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POCKET NOVELS



The Scarlet Shoulder. 77



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PACIFICUS ET

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THE
SCARLET SHOULDERS;
OR,
THE MINER RANGERS.

BY HARRY HAZARD.

AUTHOR OF THE FOLLOWING POCKET NOVELS:

38. THE HEART EATER.
43. THE WHITE OUTLAW.
54. ARKANSAS JACK.

66. RATTLING DICK.
71. DELAWARE TOM.
79. OUTLAW JACK.

NEW YORK:
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THE
SCHOOL-BOOKS;
AND

THE MIZZEE RANGERS.

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BY HENRY LINDEN

ILLUSTRATED WITH FORTY-FIVE ENGRAVINGS.

FOR CHILDREN AGED FROM FIVE TO TWELVE.
WITH DRAWINGS BY HENRY LINDEN,
AND DRAWINGS BY HENRY LINDEN,
AND DRAWINGS BY HENRY LINDEN.

NEW YORK:

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THE SCARLET SHOULDERS;

OR,

THE MINER RANGERS.

CHAPTER I.

THE TRAGEDY.

"*Indios—Indios bravos!*" yelled Manuel Navaja, as he discharged his *escopette* full at the glowing disk of old Sol; then dropping it, he rushed through the outer gates, sounding the terrible words at every step, his affright being shared by all the *peons* who heard him, and, leaving their posts, one and all swarmed to the main building.

There is a spell—a fascination like that of a rattlesnake—that none but the dweller in "the land of the sun" can know. Young and old, men, women and children felt it now, and all rushed into the *hacienda*, only intent upon their own safety. But a clear, stern voice soared above the din, above the shouts of men, the shrieks of women and children; and, aided by his strong arm, that dealt blows upon every hand, he managed to restore order so far that the inner gates were fastened securely, the window shutters closed, and doors barred, and then blockaded with such heavy articles of the furniture as could be moved. The outer gates were left open; no person would venture there, the *haciendado* being held back by a beautiful woman, who twined her arms around him with strength lent by terror.

Then, with wild yells and whoops, the half nude, paint-bedaubed horde came swarming through the gateway into the *patio*, or outer courtyard, while others assailed the building in front. The *peons* within had been hastily armed, and opened a scattering fusilade, but with little damage to the enemy, for in their terror they generally fired at random, as often with both eyes shut as taking aim.

Then the shock came. The doors shook and creaked

under the weight hurled against them ; the hinges slowly yielded, but the barricade held them in place.

If the majority of the defenders were cowardly, others were there whose courage amply supplied this deficiency. A tall, stalwart man, of a singularly handsome and noble countenance, went from post to post, reproofing or encouraging the men in a few quick words, pointing out the best methods of procedure—at times aiming an *escopette* with a skill that spoke well for his marksmanship. This was the *haciendado*, Don Christobal Canelo, a man of perhaps thirty years of age.

Close behind him was a lady, who, although her face was as pale as death, betrayed no fear ; on the contrary, whenever her husband fired a shot, and the wild yell of mortal agony followed, a smile of pride swept athwart her face, and her eyes flashed with an ardor equal to his own. Then the first fury of the assault was checked, the savages drawing behind the outbuildings, and, turning to note the extent of the damage inflicted upon his little band, Canelo noticed the presence of his wife.

"My God, Luzecita, you here ! Where is Felipe ?"

"With Josefa in the—"

"But you—this is no place for you, my wife. Think, a bullet might—"

"Pardon, Christobal ; where should I be if not by my husband's side ?"

"But not now ; there is danger. You should be with your child—our boy," urged Canelo, affectionately.

"And is there no danger to you ?" she added, reproachfully.

"It is my place—my duty to encourage and assist the peons. But think, if you are here, in danger, if will do no good, and only distract me. I could think of nothing else. If you should be—any thing happen to you, what would become of our Felipe ? Come, let me take you to him, where you will be safe, at least for the present."

"And leave you here to be killed ?"

"*Mi alma*, if that is to be my fate, your presence could not avert it, but only make it the more bitter. Your prayers to the blessed Virgin will strengthen our hands and hearts. Come," and he led her from the hall.

"See, *comarados*," exclaimed Tadeo Campos, the *capataz*, "the red-skinned devils come again. Show yourselves men now, and true Mexicans. Fire!"

He was answered by a volley that did some execution, and then the savages hurled themselves against the shattered door, hewing it with axes, battering it with beams and logs of wood that they had procured from the *caballariza* (stable), while others pummeled the window screens, or fired at the loop-holes. The *patio* was filled with smoke, and through it gleamed the oiled bodies of the Indians, as they flitted to and fro.

A large hole was now made in the door, and through it shots were exchanged. But the besieged had the advantage of being in a darkened room, while the enemy were plainly revealed. From without the shots were fired at random, although several took effect; but Campos, with his comrades, taking deliberate aim, made fearful havoc among their assailants.

But this could not last long. One of the shutters began to give way before the force applied to it, and the *grills* of strong iron bars, called *regas*, were bending inward, and the ranks of the besieged were really thinned. Then came a loud shout from without, and, with wild yells of exultation, the savages retreated, to the great joy of the *peons*, for it seemed as if a few minutes more would see the foe effect an entrance.

For a few moments all was silence within the building; even the process of reloading was checked, so eager were they to learn the cause of this strange maneuver. They could hear a faint hum from without, that told them the enemy had not yet abandoned the siege. In vain they peered through the shattered door. The smoke concealed every thing, as it was a still, foggy day, and it settled heavily upon the earth.

Then came a bright flash, a loud roar, and the *adobes* by the side of the door crumbled, while the shock made the entire house tremble. But one thing could have that effect, and the swarthy faces turned a shade more ashen as the whisper run around of:

"*Los canones!*"

Where had the cannon come from? there were none belonging to the *hacienda*. And what were the Indians doing with

such a piece ? These were questions that all asked, but none could answer.

If their danger had been great before, now it was increased tenfold. A few hours, at least, would end the struggle. The fog and smoke might prevent them from getting range of the doorway for a spell, but not long ; and then one or two balls would open a breach for their entrance. Another barricade was formed at the other end of the hall, but that could avail little. The same power would reduce that, and then it would be hilt to hilt, breast to breast.

At this new phase, Canelo sought the chamber where his wife and child were, and hastily explained the cause of the commotion.

" And now, Luzecita, you must not remain here. We can not tell what may happen, and with you and darling Felipe in safety, I can fight with a better will."

" And you ?"

" My place is here. The *peons* need my influence to encourage and direct them."

" Where you are, I stay—nay, do not interrupt me," she hastily exclaimed. " I am your wife, and will live or die with you. The blow that kills you shall reach my heart at the same time."

" But it can not be ; think—"

" I do think—I have thought, and I will stay. What would life be without you ?" the woman uttered, as she clasped him around the neck.

" My wife, you *must* listen, and you will see that what I say is best. Think of our Felipe—what would become of him if these fiends should overpower us ? Remember that not we alone would perish—and you know but too well the fate a woman would receive at their hands—but he, our bright, beautiful boy—he, too, would die !"

" Why should he live if we are killed ?" faltered the wife.

" Perhaps we may beat them off, then no harm is done. But if the worst is to be, he will have a parent's hand—a mother's love to show him how to live. Would you doom him to death, and he so brave and innocent ? And then," as he bent his head and whispered, " think of the one that is to come ; would you—"

"My husband, do not ask me ; I can not—can not leave you!" and she clung to Canelo hysterically, sobbing as though her heart would break.

"Luzecita," he cried, assuming a stern voice, while the great tears stood in his eyes, "this is folly. You *must* go, and soon, or it will be too late. See, if you refuse, I will kill myself before your eyes! And then you will have my death upon your soul, as well as that of your children!" and he held her tightly to his breast as he drew a pistol, and, cocking it, placed the barrel against his temple.

"Christobal—husband, what would you do?" shrieked his wife, struggling wildly to free her arms, so that she could avert the weapon.

"I have said, if you will not flee with Felipe—our son—as I believe in the holy Virgin, I will kill myself!"

"Enough—enough, I will go—my God, I will go!" faintly murmured the lady, as she swooned from grief and terror.

"This is a deeper pain to me, my darling, than death could bring," he murmured, as he gently placed her upon a sofa, while the scalding tears fell freely from his eyes. "My God, to speak such words to her—my heart's darling, when perhaps an hour may part us forever. It is hard, ah, so bard; but it was for *her* sake and our child's," and then he hastened from the room, after directing the terrified maid to attend to her mistress.

As he entered the hall, the cannon was fired for the second time, and the six-pound ball crashed through the barricade, shattering the furniture and scattering the splinters in every direction. One of the *peons* was killed outright, and several others severely wounded. Another shot as well aimed would clear the passage so that an entrance could be effected. Canelo knew that he had no time to spare, if he would save his dear ones.

As he looked for Tadeo Campos, he heard a loud shout and then the sound of a struggle in an adjoining room, or pantry, where there was a door leading out into the garden. Thinking the enemy had effected an entrance, he rushed to the place, just in time to see the *capataz* master one of the *peons*, and hurl him to the floor.

"What's this, Campos? Is not that Pepe Raymon?"

"*Si, señor,*" panted the *capataz*, "and a precious scoundrel he is, too. What do you think? He was unbarring the door yonder to let in the savages—the cursed dog!"

"Are you sure, Tadeo?"

"*Carrai!* yes. He pretended to be badly wounded, but I watched him, and when he sneaked off here, I followed after, and was just in time, as you see. The upper bolt is drawn!"

"Then he must be put beyond chance of doing us any further harm. Take this pistol, and when it is unloaded, come to me. I have work for you to do."

He had scarcely passed the door, when the report told that the traitor had met his doom, and then Campos overtook his master. In a few, quick words, Canelo told him what he required him to do, and although the *capataz* looked any thing but pleased at the task, he dared not hint as much.

He was to conduct his mistress and child, with the servant, by a rear exit, from the *hacienda*, trusting that the besiegers would be all occupied with the cannon and preparing for the assault, in front of the building, and the dense and smoke-laden fog, to effect their escape unseen. It would be risky to attempt securing horses, as the stable was probably occupied by the savages, so they were to hasten on foot to the *chapparal*, where they could lay concealed until the fate of the building was settled. It was risky, but would not entail as great danger as remaining in the building, when in a few minutes more, at the furthest, a hand-to-hand combat must take place.

Tadeo Campos first reconnoitered the ground, found the way clear, and then, after a few hasty words of parting, the husband, wife, and child separated, never more to meet on this earth alive.

And not a minute too soon, either. Another ball hurtled through the barricade and completed the breach. The *haciendado* returned to his men, and formed them into a double rank to meet the onset that he knew was coming. Over the heads of the kneeling ones, those in the rear leveled their *escopettes*, nerved with despair, to meet their fate like men. Many of them were the veriest cowards that lived, but now, under their master's eye, and knowing that, while there was no chance of fleeing, no quarter was to be expected from 'heir red-skinned foes, they would fight desperately and well.'

Then came the rush. There was only a subdued rustling, as of many feet cautiously planted, and then from the dense fog a horde of the painted demons rushed into the breach left by the shattered door. Their own impetuosity came near being fatal to themselves, for, as the crowd became jammed in the doorway, and entangled in the mass of broken furniture, the clear, strong tones of Canelo rung out the order to fire.

The double volley, delivered at such close quarters, was withering in its effects. The savages fell in piles, almost blocking up the entrance, and the others shrunk back from such a deadly reception. The besieged, led by Canelo, sprung forward to meet them, with *machetes*, pistols, or clubbed guns. Then came an order for the savages to rush over their dead and close hand to hand.

Christobal Canelo started, as if thunderstruck. The order had been given in *pure Castilian*, and, moreover, he could almost have sworn that he recognized the voice as that of one whom he had befriended, trusted, and loved!

And then where did an Indian—a Comanche upon the war-path—learn to speak that language so perfectly? And to his braves; could they comprehend him? If so, they must be strange savages.

But he had no further time to ponder over the matter. The savages had rallied, and tearing their dead comrades from the breach, they swarmed into the house, led by a tall, sinewy man, who dashed into the midst of his foes. In vain Canelo strove to meet this person, for he knew that if their chief was slain, the assailants would probably retreat. But the savage ever eluded him, ever kept a crowd between him and the *haciendado*. He wielded a heavy saber that, while it seemed to shed the blows rained at him, like a magic shield, dealt death or gaping wounds at every stroke.

Several savages had singled out Canelo, and were pressing him hard. Two of their number had fallen before his sword, but he was wounded, and the blood flowed freely. It required all his address and activity to keep from being clenched from behind by his enemies; but then, as he clove down the foremost, he dashed to the wall, where he could no longer be surrounded.

The savages were all around with *sabers* or *machetes*, and he

was fast failing. Still he met them bravely. A saber laid bare his cheek but the man who dealt the wound went down the next moment with his head cloven in twain.

The tall leader of the savages saw this, and, hissing out a fierce oath, drew his pistol, and, retreating to the wall at a space that was free from combatants, deliberately aimed at the brave Canelo. The latter saw nothing of this, as he desperately struggled with his assailants. Then the finger pressed upon the trigger, and there came a flash, a loud report, and the *haciendado* sunk at the feet of his foes, with the blood slowly oozing from the little discolored hole in the center of his forehead, a dead man.

His death was noted by a *peon*, and he raised the cry. It was like depriving a ship in a storm of its rudder, the fall of their leader, and with but one or two exceptions, the besieged threw down their weapons and begged for quarter. But the mercy they received was like that rendered famous in the revolutionary war, as "*Tarleton quarter*."

One by one they were cut down, even as they kneeled and implored mercy in the Virgin's name, and in two minutes after the death of Christobal Canelo the only survivors were they who wore the paint and trappings of Comanche warriors; even those who were dying received a finishing stroke.

The leader did not await this. As soon as he had murdered the *haciendado*, he left the hall, and proceeded at once, and without hesitation, to the room where Canelo had so shortly before changed his wife's resolve of sharing his fate. He looked through this apartment as though he was seeking some person, and then ran hurriedly into the other rooms, but with the same result. What he sought was not there.

Calling to his men in a tone choked with rage and baffled vengeance, he cried to one, a huge, herculean man:

"*Mil diablos*, Barajo, the birds have both vanished! But they can't be gone far, for they were here an hour since. Take you a few men and circle around the place. Scatter, and look well, for if they are lost, what we have done here is all for nothing. Find them and a thousand *pesos* are yours. *Al monte—al monte!* *Capa de Dios!* why do you wait?" raged the disguised Mexican or Spaniard, for surely an Indian tongue never mastered the *lingua Espagnol* so perfectly.

But at length the men returned from a fruitless search, and then, half wild with rage and disappointment, the leader reluctantly gave the order for marching, and they filed out from the *hacienda*. The building was left intact, with the exception of what injury had been done by the cannon. The out-houses were undisturbed ; the stock, both horses and cloven-footed animals, were abandoned. Truly they were a strange war-party of Comanches in more ways than one.

CHAPTER II.

A STORY TOLD AND A SURPRISE.

"*Madre mia*, why so sad this bright and beautiful day, when all should be as gay and happy as it is out of doors?" exclaimed a young girl, as she entered the room, and, kneeling at her mother's feet, lifted the bowed head, holding it between her two dainty palms, and pressed affectionate kisses upon the pale cheeks and lips.

"Ah, child, if you knew what anniversary this sad day is, you would not wonder at my grief," returned the elder lady, mournfully. "Luisa, child, how old are you?" she added, half vacantly.

"Why, mother, need you ask that?" laughed her daughter. "I am nearly nineteen ! Almost an old woman, aren't I?" and her soft, gleesome laugh again rung out.

"Listen, Luisa ; you have never learned the true way in which your father—my husband, died. But you are old enough now, and I think I can bear to tell it all. I have been thinking of the past this morning—of your father and brother, child, who was stolen when you were a babe."

"*Stolen!*" exclaimed Luisa, eagerly. "I thought you said he was dead?"

"And so he is—he *must* be, or I should have found him years ago," murmured the mother; and then she detailed at length the incidents embodied in our first chapter, so far as she was conversant with them.

"We lay concealed in the *chapparal*, where the undergrowth was most dense, Felipe and I, together with Tadeo Campos

and Josefa. How we managed to reach the place, I know not. My mind was distracted with fear for my husband and my son. And then, as we crouched there, under a thorny *mezquiti*, we heard the loud shouts and tramping of men, as they searched for us, and we could hear them speaking *in Spanish!*

"Oh, how my poor heart bounded with joy then, as I thought that my husband had been victorious, and would have cried aloud to them, if brave, prudent Tadeo had not placed his hand upon my mouth, and bade me beware; that he feared they were foes.

"He said that he had suspected the men who had attacked the *hacienda* were not Indians, although disguised as such, but were Mexicans. Why, he did not say, but bade me remain quiet for my child's sake, while he would reconnoiter, and learn for certain who the voices belonged to that we had heard. Then he crawled along and was gone but a few moments before he returned. One glance at his face told me the worst, and I swooned away in my great grief.

"It was but too true. The *hacienda* had been taken, and my husband killed, not by Indians, but by our own countrymen, although who they were or who led them we never learned. Toward midnight we cautiously returned to the house, and there I found your father, dead! shot through the brain!

"It was a horrible sight. The mangled bodies of our brave peons lay in heaps upon the floor, where they had been slain. Not one of them had been spared, or escaped that dreadful massacre, save us four. All were dead!

"The house, as you see, was left standing, the herds were untouched; nothing, save a few articles of plate and the ready money, was taken. Surely a war-party of Indians would never act in this manner, and it further confirmed a belief that the marauders were of our own country. But what was their object? Alas, I fear it was but to murder all, although for what reason I know not.

"We mounted our horses and fled from the spot, after burying your father, and did not rest until we reached the city of Guanajuato, where we arrived nearly dead from fatigue and hunger, and told our tale to the kind friends we met there. I

dispatched Tadeo Campos, with a note detailing the sad tragedy, to your uncle Augustin Canelo, who was then at the city of Mexico.

"He was fearfully enraged and grieved at his brother's murder, and vowed to search the world over but he would have revenge. But we could give him no clue to the assassins. Well, he sent a number of his own *peons* to the *hacienda*, and when it was renovated we returned to it. He remained with us at my request, and for a year all went well. He would be absent for weeks at a time on business connected with his silver mines, or searching for some trace of the murderers.

"I thought my cup of sorrow was full, even to overflowing, but I had yet to endure more; another fearful blow awaited me. You, my child, were nearly six months old, when one day our little Felipe, the darling boy, so brave and beautiful, and the image of his father, was torn from me. He had been stolen, but by whom or how, could never be discovered. The Indians were very troublesome then, and I thought that perhaps they had stolen, perhaps murdered my son for the sake of the rich clothes and costly jewels that he wore.

"For long months we searched far and wide for some traces of him, but in vain. The river and *arroyos* were dragged, the *chaparral* searched inch by inch, but there were no traces found. In my grief I thought I should die, but it was denied me. And now do you wonder at my sorrow? On this day, nineteen years ago, my husband was murdered; one year later, on the same day, your brother Felipe disappeared—perhaps met the same fate!" and she bowed her head upon her hands, while the hot, scalding tears trickled through her fingers.

The girl at her feet sat in silence, her dark eyes dimmed at the tragical tale she had just listened to. Her sorrow was less than that of her mother, for her brother she could not remember, and the father her eyes had never rested upon, seemed but in a remote degree associated with herself. It was a subject that her mother had ever avoided, and Luisa was too gay and light-hearted to press the topic; so it is not to be wondered at that she did not feel the intense grief that agitated the form of her mother.

No one who could have seen her then would have pronounced her other than beautiful. She was rather under the

medium size, but so perfectly proportioned that she appeared taller. Her large, lustrous black eyes were shaded by lashes of the deepest jet, and her finely-arched eyebrows were of the same sable hue. Glossy black tresses were braided like a coronet around her finely-formed head, whence a mass of fine ringlets flowed over a neck and shoulders which would have been considered fair even in our land of blonde beauties, and in her sunny clime were deemed white as the newly-fallen snow. A stranger's eye would detect and dwell upon the faintly dark shading on her upper lip, that in a youth might have been termed an incipient mustache. But is it a blemish? Her friends thought otherwise. It but added another attraction to her piquant beauty.

Her mother was slightly taller, but the same contour of face and great resemblance, although somewhat impaired by time and sorrow, showed that Senora Luzecita Canelo lived again in her daughter Luisa.

They were aroused by a light tap at the half opened door, and glanced around.

"Well Josefa, what is it?" said Luisa.

The old nurse entered the room on tiptoe, as if fearful of disturbing the mistress, and whispered, in a low tone:

"It is a stranger, 'na Luisa, on particular business, he says, and—"

"Well, where is Sarguela; he attends to all such, as you know, Josefa," interupted the maiden, a little impatiently.

"Don Garcia is with him, but he says he must see the se nora; that his business is for her ear alone," hesitated Josefa.

"Wishes to see *me*," asked the lady, looking up. "What and who is he?"

"That he will not tell; but he is a handsome *cavallero*, and —pardon me, lady, if I say that he is a perfect image of *el coronel* when I first saw him."

"Of my husband?" exclaimed the lady, as her face flushed. "And young, say you? Oh, Santissima Virgin, if it should be —ah, no, he is dead long since," she murmured; then added: "Go, Josefa, and show him here. I will see him."

In a few moments the old nurse, as she was still called, returned and ushered in the persistent stranger. At first he appeared somewhat abashed and ill at ease, for the ladies ha-

arisen and were facing the door in half eager expectation, and quickly doffing his hat he made a stiff, slightly awkward bow.

"My heart, the picture!" faltered Senora Canelo, pointing to a full-length portrait of her husband, hanging against the wall.

Luisa instantly checked the smile that lurked around her rosy mouth, called forth by the *outre* demeanor of the stranger, and she too uttered an exclamation as she glanced from the face to the picture.

"I crave your pardon, ladies, if I appear rude, but I hav. seen so little of society, that for a moment I was dazzled," he apologized, in a soft, musical tone. "Am I right in thinking I address Senora Canelo?"

"That is my name, senor; and yours?"

"Alas, lady, *once* I would not have hesitated in replying *Felipe Barana*; but now, if this packet does not give me a name, I know not that I have one," replied the youth, in a mournful tone, as he advanced and placed a small parcel, securely tied and sealed, in the trembling hand of the senora.

"Felipe—he said Felipe, and then that face," murmured she, as she sunk heavily into the chair she had just quitted, and with trembling fingers began to untie the package.

"Be seated, senor," said Luisa, motioning to a chair, and placing one for herself, so as as to partially screen her mother, whom she saw was strangely perturbed.

Senora Canelo tore the wrapper apart, and laying upon an inner package was a note superscribed with her name, in a bold, firm hand that seemed familiar. It was unsealed, and opening its folds, she hurriedly glanced at the contents. Then, with a wild cry, she started to her feet, and advanced a step toward the stranger, but her limbs refused to do their duty, and she sunk to the floor in a swoon.

Luisa bent over her, shrieking for help, and as she loosened the throat of her mother's dress she caught the words:

"*Felipe—my son—thank God!*"

Josefa came rushing in, and unceremoniously hustled the stranger out of the room, and set about restoring her mistress.

"Never fear, 'na Luisa, it is only a fainting fit; there's no cause of alarm. In a few moments it will be over."

"Are you sure, Josefa, are you sure?" eagerly queried the sobbing girl. "Ay de mi! She looks like dead!"

"No, no; it's nothing—nothing at all. Why, bless you, child, she's had thousands of them!" returned the old nurse, exaggerating a little, the better to reassure Luisa. "See, the color comes to her lips, and, praise the Virgin, her eyes open!"

"Oh, mother, mother, I thought you were dead!"

"Where—where is he—Felipe, my son?" and the lady half raised from the lounge, glancing eagerly around the room, then sinking back, she wailed, "*Nuestra Madre de los Merced!* it was all a dream, a cruel, bitter dream!"

"No, no, it was no dream; he is here—the stranger, I mean, who looks so much like papa's portrait. And see, here is the letter he gave you!" exclaimed Luisa, placing the note in her mother's hand.

"Call—but no, I must have been mistaken; *he* is dead long, long since! My daughter, read what *it* says, to me; my eyes are blurred, and I can not see."

Luisa opened the note with intense curiosity, but then looked up in surprise.

"Why, mother, it is from Uncle Augustin!"

"Yes, go on—read, quick!"

"**MY DEEPLY-WRONGED SISTER:**" it began, "when you read this, I shall be no more. I am dying, and the *padre* tells me that, before tha sun goes down, I shall be dead. How this occurred, the bearer of this, my dying confession, will tell you. I have deeply wronged you and yours, and stained my soul with a horrible crime; but now make reparation as far as lies in my power. Listen, and, in God's mercy, do not curse me after I am dead! I hired the men who, disguised as Comanches, attacked the *hacienda* nineteen years ago, and by my hand, *my brother*—your husband—died! I was mad, crazy, but I loved you, and thought that, if he was out of the way, in time you would listen to my suit. Then I caused your son, Felipe, to be stolen, and at the time meant to kill him, for I was poor, and he stood between me and wealth. But my heart failed me, and he yet lives, a noble, brave boy, who looks at me with *your* eyes and *his* father's face. I can not tell you all I would of my reasons for the crimes I confess, for my strength is fast failing. But I will send this by **YOUR SON**, although he knows not who his parents are. I inclose the jewels and a scarf that he wore when he was first abducted, so that you may have no doubt. And now listen to my prayer, the last I shal ever make. I know I have been fearfully guilty, yet I do not think I could rest in my grave if you should curse me as the murderer of your husband. I do not ask for forgiveness, but that you will strive to forget me; as though I had never been born. May the holy Virgin ever smile upon and guard you, and cause the son I return to your heart to be a joy and a blessing. As I hope for **mercy hereafter, he is your only son, Felipe.**

"AUGUSTIN CANELO."

The mother did not speak while this strange letter was being read, but pressed both hands tightly upon her bosom, as if to still the painful throbings of her heart, while the breath came in gasps from between her pallid lips. When the last word was pronounced, she essayed in vain to arise; then, as she sunk back, feebly whispered to Luisa, who was scarcely less agitated than herself:

"Go, Luisa; go bring YOUR BROTHER to me!"

The sister needed no further prompting, but sped away like a startled fawn to the room where her brother had been so unceremoniously consigned by Josefa. He was pacing rapidly to and fro, his handsome countenance expressing no small degree of wonder and perplexity.

"Felipe, my brother, don't you know your little sister, Luisa?" she cried, and throwing her arms around his broad shoulders, stood on tip-toe to press her lips to his.

He was startled, as well he might be, but the tempting lips, pouting out like twin cherries, would have enticed far older and more sedate hearts than his, and clasping her to his breast, he pressed kiss after kiss upon her blushing face, with an ardor that half alarmed her. Truly, it would be pleasant, really pleasant, to be a big brother, if all sisters were like Luisa. But the voice of the mother was heard from within, calling him to hasten, and Luisa said:

"Come, Felipe, brother; come to mother," and together they entered the room.

Old Josefa stole out from the apartment, and we will follow her example, for the meeting between the long-parted ones was sacred. But an hour afterward the three were seated close together, while before them lay the jewels and scarf that the mother instantly recognized, and they removed any doubt that she could have entertained as to the reality of the youth's identity.

"Do you recollect nothing whatever of this place, Felipe?" asked his mother.

"I can not just now. Perhaps it will come back to me when I am a little less bewildered. Remember what a surprise I have had; I, who thought I was alone in the world, without even a *name*," he replied, as he kissed first one and then the other.

"No; the first I can remember is being in a little village on a mountain's side, and then it changes to a vast and gloomy cavern, with wild-looking men all around me. I know now that they were Jarochos and a sort of *guerilleros*, who robbed; but I never knew of their shedding blood, unless in a quarrel between themselves. And as I grew older I became one of them. Do not start, or look so terrified, for you must remember that I knew no better. It was the way I had been taught and I thought all men were like us.

"The man whom I called father—your uncle, Luisa, who went by the name of Don Serapio Barana—was the chief or leader of the band, and he taught me this, and gave me the education I have; him and *padre* Gayferos. He would often be gone for weeks and months at a time, and then the lieutenant, Lopez Romulo, would be left in command. He was a wicked, cruel man, and I hated him!" Felipe added, while his eyes flashed and a hand crept to the jeweled hilt of the poniard that peeped from his bosom.

"Twice he insulted me so bitterly that, if it had not have been for those around me, I would have slain him like a dog, as he is. Well, one day, perhaps two weeks since, when I returned from a hunt of several days' duration, I found Don Barana at the point of death. How it happened I only could learn that he had been wounded in an attack upon a *conducta de plata*" (convoy of silver), "in which the band had been repulsed with severe loss. Then he told me that he was not my father, but that he would send me with a package, and the one who received it would tell me all concerning who and what I was. He made me promise to deliver the packet into no hands but your own, as I valued my future.

"Then *padre* Gayferos dismissed us all from the room or chamber in the cave, as he wished to receive his last confession. In a few minutes they told me he was dead, and then I took a last farewell of my rough but kind friends. I amused myself on the long journey with picturing what would be my reception—who I would turn out to be; but ah, *mi almas*, the most romantic air castle did not realize the truth!" he exclaimed, as he caressed his newly-found relatives.

"Oh, my children," murmured the mother, "this has ever been a fearful, horrible anniversary for me, hitherto, but now

it will be divided with joy. On it I lost a dear husband and a son; but the one is an angel in heaven, where he is now smiling down upon us, and the other is here! Oh, my son, my Felipe, we must never more part in this world. For eighteen years I have mourned for you, and—”

“ And now, for thrice that long we will rejoice together!” exclaimed Luisa joyously, as she nestled closer against her brother’s arm, looking lovingly up into his handsome face.

CHAPTER III.

MARCOS SAYOSA, THE YOUNG MINER.

THE *venta* of *tia* Joaquina was widely celebrated among the miners of Los Rayas for the excellence of its liquors, the fine flavor of its *cigarettes*, and the buxom beauty of *el patrona*, or “the hostess.” Situated on the outskirts of Guanajuato, it was allowed a little more license than would have been shown it, had it stood in a more respectable portion of the city. Many a night of wild revelry, drinking, carousing, quarreling, and fighting had been passed there by the hot-headed young miners of the surrounding country, without fear of being interrupted by the entrance of the *alguazils*, to wind up their festivities by a morning visit at the *levee* of the *alcalde*.

Many a tragic scene had those old walls witnessed, either within or without, as the miners of Los Rayas, as a general thing, are not over punctilious in regard to the shedding of blood when their veracity or honor is deemed brought in question.

A young man was slowly approaching the *venta*, and although he kept his hand upon the haft of his *cuchillo*, it was more from habit than caution, for he was evidently in a deep reverie. But when he reached the door of the *posada*, he threw off this feeling, and entering the room, was met by the *patrona*, a large, handsome woman of perhaps forty years.

“ Well, ’nor Marcos, you are here at last,” she exclaimed, warmly greeting the miner, who was an especial favorite with her. “ The *cavalleros* have given you up, and, as you can hear, are enjoying themselves hugely,” she added, as a burst of laughter came from beyond a thickly-listed door

"Yes, *tía* Joaquina, I was delayed, and even now, if I must confess the truth, I own more than half inclined to give the lads a cold shoulder to-night. I am not in the humor for revelry," said he, in a low voice, that sounded rich and deep as the tones of a flute.

"*P'r Dios*, that would never do! There is business to be done to-night. I believe they have heard that on the morrow the *Mellardios* are going to try the strength of your "Scarlet Shoulders," and see if the defeat you gave them at the last—"

"By the Virgin of Atocha! but that is good news," exclaimed Marcos, his full, black eyes sparkling with ardor. "We will teach the—"

"*H'la, 'na* Joaquina!" shouted a voice, as the door was opened and a head thrust through the aperture from within. "Bring some more—*mira, comarados*, the capitan is making love to Santa Joaquina!" he yelled, as he caught sight of the young miner.

"Treason—treason!" they shouted, as several rushed forth, and, clustering around Marcos, forced him laughingly into the room, where he was greeted with cheers and *vivas*, that testified to his popularity.

It was a long, low-ceiled room, the rude *adobe* walls white-washed, but the rough rafters overhead were black with smoke and festooned with cobwebs, the accumulations of years. A rough table ran the entire length of the room, with a narrow passage at either end. Along the sides and secured to the walls were small stands, intended for three persons each, and all equally guiltless of cloth or covering of any kind. Lights were suspended from overhead, and, with candles stuck in niches around the walls, illumined the room sufficiently for the purpose.

A thick, hazy cloud of smoke now filled every crevice, being supplied by the glowing *cigarette* that each man held, some forty in number. Before them were scattered various utensils that were, or had been, full of liquor. Tin and bone cups, stone jugs and leather bottles, in every possible position that such utensils could possibly assume, covered the table. The *patrona* was far too careful of her crockery to intrust it in such hands, even though sure of being paid for the damage done. It was too scarce a commodity.

He who was called Marcos Sayosa finally seated himself at one of the side tables, with two of his more particular friends, who quickly enlightened him as to the truth of the subject hinted at by Joaquina. To understand it more fully, the reader must know that the men who worked in Los Rayas, and those of Mellado, a neighboring mine, were bitter rivals, each party contending that their mine was the richest and best, and many were the contests, both single and *en masse*, that had taken place; all leaving the point in question as far from being settled as ever. It had reached such a point that regular organizations were formed on both sides, with officers chosen, signals and passwords arranged, and the office of *spy* was well rewarded. Of the miners from Rayas, who had gained the *soubriquet*, "Scarlet Shoulders," from the knot of ribbon of that color they wore around their left shoulder, Marcos Sayosa was the chief, while a middle-aged man, Perico Fuenter by name, commanded the opposition. The two war-crys, "Rayas" or "Mellado," were as famous and promptly answered as that of the 'prentices in London of "clubs." When they were heard, those not belonging to the faction barred their doors, and sought such place of security as they could find.

"You see," said Lucas Planillas, the second in command, "they swear they will go through the town on the morrow, and make every man drink to the health of their cursed hole, and vow that it is far superior to our blessed mine."

"I wish them joy of the attempt," sneered Marcos, "but this—this spy; who is he? I never heard of him before as I know of."

"Sylva Cohecho is his name. But who he is I know not, save that he gave the signals and grips all correct. Look, yonder he is, at the next table. Shall I call him?"

"No, no; I wish to take a good look at the gentleman first. So, that is he?"

The man that he looked upon was one that would have attracted attention in any company, not for his beauty, either of face or person; on the contrary, he was rather undersized, but had the head and shoulders of a giant. As he faced the captain, with one arm dangling by the side of his seat, the immense length of arm and deepness of his chest

was fully revealed. His cheeks and chin was covered with a stiff, bristly mass of grizzled hair of much more recent growth than his mustache, the ends of which rested upon his shoulders. He was dressed in the usual holiday garb of the *mineros*, and from beneath the slouched brim of his straw hat one piercing black eye glanced around the room. The bridge of his nose was wanting, the purple scar showing that it had been mutilated by the same blow that had deprived him of his eye. Altogether he was not exactly the person a traveler would be pleased to meet upon a solitary road. And so thought Marcos.

"*Voto a Brios, 'nor Lucas, but he is a hang-dog looking fellow. Are you sure he is not a spy upon the wrong side?*" muttered Sayosa.

" You know as much about him as I do," returned Planillas. " But if you suspect, better end it before harm is done. Say but the word, a nod, and he will never trouble any one, unless it is his master, the devil," significantly tapping the hilt of his knife that peeped from his shirt frill.

" No, Planillas; at least not until I have had speech with him. The *mercal* he is using so freely may loosen his tongue after awhile. But have you sent messengers to the rest of the band?"

" By daylight the city will be full, and all prepared for business," said the lieutenant, as he lighted another cigar.

They sat conversing in whispers for some time, forming their plans for the expected assault, and drinking but sparingly. Then the young captain heard a name mentioned that made him start from his chair and listen intently.

" *H'la, 'nor Carlos,*" shouted a young man across the table, " you know how you were foiled by that little Carlita, the one who lives with old *tio Tomas*? Here is a *cavallero* who has been smiled upon by the Virgin, ay, and the black-eyed *doncella*, too!"

" Who is it you mean. Not yourself, I hope," replied the man addressed, a little sarcastically.

" Not so happy. But I referred to Senor Don Despierto here."

" 'Tis true, *senores cavalleros*," added Despierto, with mock modesty. " I saw the beautiful Carlita, and as I had nothing

of greater importance on my hands, I laid siege to her affections, and—succeeded."

"By Venus, the cunning little prude, and she would not so much as even look at me!" murmured Don Carlos. "But how far did you succeed?"

"How far can—"

"Hold, Senor Despierto!" shouted Marcos, as he leaped forward and grasped the speaker by the shoulder. "*Por los Santos!* if you do not retract that base calumny, and say that you foully lied of one who is as pure as the holy Virgin herself, I will tear your tongue out by the roots, and force it down your throat!" he hissed, compressing his fingers until it seemed they would meet through the yielding flesh.

"*Mil demonios*, if you were twice my captain, you should answer for this," gritted Estevan Despierto. "Uloose your hand, or I'll unloosen it with a dose of steel."

"Bah, if you looked on a knife you'd turn pale and run like a *coyote*!" said Marcos, as he hurled the other from his seat, half way through the crowd that had gathered around the disputants.

"Look out, Marcos; he's drawn his *cuchillo*," cautioned Planillas, as he leaped before his captain, who was prepared for the attack of his foe. "*Abojo—abojo los armas* (down with your weapons). Do you think there are no bodies to carve but those of your friends? Remember the *Melladios*!" he added.

"Peace, *nor* Planillas. He must either retract his words, and acknowledge he was lying, or not all the saints will save him from my vengeance," calmly, but bitterly said Sayosa.

"A Despierto is not a Sayosa. He never denies his word," sneered Don Estevan.

"Enough. Stand aside, *comarados*, and let us end this," gritted Marcos, drawing his *cuchillo* and wrapping a *frazada* (a woolen cloak) around his left arm.

"*Hla, senores*," called a voice from the crowd. "Fair play! let them fight upon the great table, so we can all see the sport."

Ready for any thing that was novel, the *mineros* soon cleared the table, by brushing the drinking utensils upon the floor—thus proving the *patrona's* prudence in abjuring

crockery. A few minutes sufficed for this, and then the combatants leaped upon the table, prepared for the *sport*, while the spectators crowded around the arena, or stood upon the little stands by the side of the walls, eagerly staking their money upon the first wound and result of the duel.

Marcos had doffed his hat and outer *jayнета*, revealing a closely-fitting garment of quilted silk. A sash was tightly bound around his waist, and a handkerchief secured his long hair from falling over his face. His antagonist was prepared much like the same. They were both handsome, well-built and hardened men, but there was a peculiar look about Despierto, that could only result from dissipation and excesses, that was not visible in his adversary, and the older gamblers freely laid their money against him. They knew that in a prolonged contest he must go down before his more temperate foe.

"*Andela!*" (forward), shouted Lucas Planillas.

At the word both men bounded forward, and their knives met with a clash that sent showers of tiny sparks to the table. Then their thrusts and blows were made so quickly, the parries and changes of position were so rapid, that the eye could not follow them. It was like the rapid shifting of the kaleidoscope when quickly turned. The eye could catch the motion, but ere it could fix the details, another combination would obliterate its predecessor.

Despierto was slowly being forced back, or retreated from policy, when, as Marcos stood near the edge of the table, Sylva Cohecho—he who had brought the news of the intended attack by the *Melladios*—thrust forth a hand, and strove to catch the young miner by the foot. If he had succeeded it must have been fatal, for Estevan would have profited by the stumble, and ended the combat then and there. But Lucas' eye caught the motion in time to frustrate it, and as he delivered a swift blow behind the spy's ear with his clenched fist, an adroit trip of the foot sent him headlong under the table.

"Cursed crookback, you would do murder?" yelled Planillas, drawing his knife and diving under the table just as Cohecho crowded out through the crowd, who were ignorant of the cause of the disturbance.

He ran to the door, and turning, saw Lucas dart forward. Drawing a pistol from his belt, he fired at the youth, the bullet piercing his *sombrero*, while a faint yell and heavy fall among the spectators told that the bullet had not been entirely harmless. Cohecho saw Planillas stagger, and thinking his aim had been true, burst open the door with a strong pull, and rushed through the bar-room, gaining the open street in safety, sending back a wild, taunting laugh of triumph.

Further pursuit would be worse than useless, so the miners returned to the room where the fight was still in progress, and a little knot gathered around the dead body of a youth, who had been shot through the brain by the missile intended for Planillas. The latter only gave one glance at the victim, and then turned to view the duel.

They were both wounded, but evidently not very severely. The perspiration ran in streams from their bronzed faces. Marcos adroitly unrolled the *frazada* that enveloped his left arm until it nearly reached the floor. And, as the motions of his knife were thus concealed, penetrated his antagonist's guard, and sent his long blade to the hilt in Despierto's body.

But an attempted parry of the latter diverted the aim slightly, and instead of passing between his ribs, as was intended, the knife glanced into his back, inflicting a painful flesh wound, but not disabling the duelist. The force of the blow, however, staggered him, and he fell upon his back, as his foot slipped upon some blood. Marcos kicked the knife from his grasp, and then kneeling upon his breast, pressed the point of his knife against the man's throat.

"Now, base liar, unsay the words, or by the Virgin of Atocha, I will kill you like a dog!"

"I am Don Estevan Despierto!" scornfully replied the defeated duelist, as though in those words were contained his answer to the threat.

"Once more I ask you. If you do not, before I count ten, you will never speak again!"

"Bah! your arm is not strong enough, nor your heart brave enough to kill a man," sneered Despierto, vindictively struggling to free himself.

For a moment all was breathless silence in the room. Naught was heard but the half-choked breathing of the man, who, lay-

ing upon his back, with a foeman's knees pressing into his breast—the dull, red gleam of the long knife that had already drank his blood, as it was poised above his throat, glancing full in his eyes, quailed not, but glowered fiercely at his conqueror, as if daring the final blow. Then a faint murmur ran around the room, half of admiration, half of pity for the bold, strong-hearted man who was about to meet his death. But no one offered to interfere; had he done so, a score of knives would have confronted him. By the miner's laws of the entire country, Despierto's life was forfeited to his victor, to be taken when and how his fancy might dictate. Still, a shudder ran over the spectators as the voice of the young miner began to count; it had a hard, metallic ring to it, that appeared to fill the entire room, like the clanging of a huge bell.

“*Uno, dos, tres, cuatro, cinco, seis, siete, ocho—*”

But he counted no further, for the door was thrown violently open, and Joaquina rushed in from the bar-room, screaming:

“*Valga me Dios, caballeros, you are betrayed! The accursed Melladios are here. Hay mucho—muchíssimos!*” (they are many.)

Instantly all was confusion. Several of those nearest the door ran out to the entrance to see if it was not a false alarm, while the rest hastily possessed themselves of their firearms that were stacked in the corner of the room. Marcos Sayosa arose from the prostrate body of his foe, and said:

“We will settle this affair afterward. Now, every man is needed. Will you help your comrades?”

“I belong to the band,” haughtily replied Despierto, “and will do my duty. You will not have to search for me, if we are both alive after we chastise these beggarly hounds.”

“Good! I will trust you.”

A loud roar, as of many voices, was heard from without, closely followed by a volley of firearms, and then two of the “Scarlet Shoulders” re-entered, bearing between them the wounded body of their comrade.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MINER'S RIOT.

"*Anda, comarados,*" shouted Sayosa, "push the table against the door, quick ; the *ladrones* are here!"

This was performed, but none too soon, for, as the massive table was thrust against the closed door, a rush was heard in the outer room, and the assailants gave it a fearful shock ; but thanks to its brace, the heavy puncheon did not give way, although it shook upon its hinges. A volley was fired at the door, but it was only a waste of ammunition, as the four inches of well-seasoned wood resisted all such attempts.

"Out with the lights, men, and then open the loops. Perhaps we may return the compliments of our friends outside," added Marcos.

The shouts of the besiegers in the tap room, together with the clashing of the bar fixtures, told but too plainly the fate of the *patrona's* wines and liquors. Nothing else could be expected, for the *mineros* were not accustomed to having such a windfall every day, and even those who usually were so chary of the exhilarating beverage when good, hard money had to be disgorged in lieu, now emptied glass after glass.

Joaquina cowered in one corner of the room, ringing her hands in despair, as she pictured her loss, praying to the Virgin that the liquor might choke the *ladrones*, or pouring out a torrent of vituperation that only an enraged *Mexicana* could invent.

"*Madre de Dios*, good *patrona*, rest your tongue for a while," exclaimed Marcos, half impatiently, "or the *padre* will require a fortune before he can absolve you at next confession. Look, if you are injured by this night's work, we will make it up to you either in money or a *venta*."

"*Muy bueno*, then I hope the villains will drink the barrels dry, for then they would be beyond doing you any harm."

"Ha, that is a good thought! Is there enough for that, 'na Joaquina?"

" You will—"

" Capitan, there is a large body of men out here in full view. Shall we fire ?" interrupted a man who was standing at a loop-hole.

He was speedily answered, for scarcely had the words issued from his lips, than a blaze of light shone in at the loop-holes, and the loud roar of many guns told that the half-drunk *Melladios* had fired a volley at the building. The man who had just spoken gave a convulsive spring into the air, and fell dead at his young leader's feet, shot through the throat. A low, thrilling rattle, a gasp, and he was dead !

" Fire, men, fire !" yelled Sayosa, as he sprung to the loop-hole thus vacated, and sent his bullet with the rest.

The stars shone brightly enough to indistinctly reveal the forms of their assailants as they surged to and fro in the open space beyond, and at the dense mass were the guns discharged with deadly effect. The reports were followed by a hideous uproar : the groans and shrieks of the wounded, mingled with the hoarse yells of rage and vengeance of their comrades ; the rushing tramp hither and yon, as they retreated or advanced, according to their courage or recklessness ; the clang of steel, shot and *escopettes* against the pavement as the weapons were reloaded ; the flash and dull roar as a piece was discharged at the building—all made up a wild, weird picture.

Afar off could faintly be heard the roll of a drum and call of bugles, showing that the town was alarmed, but that afforded neither fear to the one nor hope to the other party, for well they knew that the military force available could do nothing toward quelling the riots, and, before aid could be procured, the matter would be decided in one way or the other.

Marcos Sayosa had no fear of the ultimate result being against him. He knew that his comrades of the Rayas mine would soon learn of their situation, and, until they should arrive to the rescue, he could hold the building against the *Melladios*. So, by his orders, the men kept up a steady fusilade from the loop-holes wherever a foe could be seen, and by dodging as quickly as their shot was delivered, the return fire, aimed at the flashes, was harmless, although several bullets passed through the apertures.

Then came a wild, ferocious yell from the besiegers, as if at

the arrival of some powerful auxiliary. The occupants of the *posada* were not long left in doubt as to the meaning of this uproar. Indeed, the truth was suspected before the cries had died away, and those nearest to the door soon heard the roaring, crackling sound that but one thing emits—fire.

It was but too true. The *Melladios* had splintered the shelves, outer door, and bar-room furniture, piled it in the center of the room and against the partition door, poured spirits over it, and then applied a candle. Although the side-walls were of sun-dried bricks, or *adobes*, there was plenty of fuel in the floors, partition, roof and ceiling, that would burn like tinder, and was a danger not to be scorned.

"Bah! the drunken fools; let them yell. We will foil them yet," sneered Sayosa. "Here, half a dozen of you cut a hole through the *adobes* at the further end. You can do it easily with your *machetes* and *cuchillos*. The rest of you keep up a fire on the demons out yonder. The light will reveal them plainly now, and it will keep them from suspecting what we are doing. This bonfire will show our *compairanos* where to seek us, and then we will take a dear revenge upon these rascally dogs who disgrace the name of *mineros*!"

While uttering these directions, the young leader was not idle, but led the party in their work upon the end wall of the building. Under the sharp points of their weapons, wielded by strong and willing hands, the hard clay began to crumble and fall to the floor. But it was thick, and required time. The fire had already begun to creep along the roof of the apartment, and the massive door showed signs of rapid burning upon its inner side. The room was oppressively hot and close; perspiration dampened the clothes of the besieged, and in their eagerness to obtain a breath of fresh air, through the loop-holes, they exposed themselves to the bullets of the beleaguers, and two were instantly killed, while several others received flesh-wounds in the head, more or less dangerous.

Then a blow, better directed than the rest, pierced the wall, the wielder's hand and arm following the knife. They could not suppress a shout of joy, and worked on with increased energy to enlarge the aperture. Foot by foot it fell outward, and then, when it was large enough for their purpose, Marcos ordered his followers to reload all their firearms, as it was

likely they would be needed. Then, selecting two of the most trustworthy miners, he directed them to hasten at full speed through the town, and raise assistance by sounding the motto of the Scarlet Shoulders.

Then the little band pressed through the aperture, and the messengers darted off into the darkness upon their errand. Before the last of the Scarlet Shoulders were outside of the burning building, a loud shout told both them and the main body of their foes that they were discovered. A wild rush was made toward them, and telling the terrified *patrona* to flee for her life, Marcos retreated rapidly from the circle of light cast by the burning *venta*.

The *Melladios* came rushing on, outnumbering their rivals three to one, and evidently thinking that the Scarlet Shoulders would not dare risk a hand-to-hand combat. Indeed, several of the miners shouted out that the cowards were running, in a derisive voice. But if this was their thoughts, they were soon undeceived. As soon as the gloom was entered, and while the enemy were in the broad light, Marcos Sayosa directed :

"*Comarados*, when I give the word, fire, and then drop on your faces. The man that stands up will never do so again!"

The little band stood firm with leveled carbines, and the foe approached. Half crazed with drink, they thought not of caution, but with demoniac hoots and yells, they crossed the point Sayosa had selected as the limit. Like a clarion note the young miner's voice sounded :

"*Fire, men, fire!*"

As a sheet of lightning the carbines vomited their contents almost in the face of the enemy, at less than twenty paces. The front ranks went down like the weeds before a prairie fire, as many, perhaps, from surprise and terror as wounds. Those in the rear discharged a random volley, but as the Scarlet Shoulders had obeyed their leader's orders and dropped to the ground, it was perfectly harmless.

"Now, *compadres*, out with your steel, and teach the cowardly dogs better manners than to molest men!" yelled Marcos, as he drew his *machete* and sprung into the *melee*.

Before the *Melladios* recovered from the confusion the unexpected onslaught had thrown them into, their foes were upon them, slashing and thrusting, fighting with sword in one hand,

a knife in the other with which to deal wounds or ward off blows, as might be. Thus a fearful scene ensued.

The dense mass of swarthy, powerful men, swaying to and fro, wielding the deadly weapons they had been familiar with from childhood ; yelling, cursing, cheering and blaspheming like a horde of demons fresh let loose from pandemonium ; the long black hair floating around their fierce, inflamed faces with every movement ; the weapons flashing around them, clashing together until tiny showers of sparks gritted from the steel, falling swiftly, to rise again, gleaming a dull red, while the ruby drops of life-blood trickled from the edge or point ; the shrieks and moans of the wounded wretches as they are trampled ruthlessly under foot ; the falling forms of those who are stricken unto death in their tracks, or tottering away from the *melee* to fall in some unoccupied spot, where they can die undisturbed, save by the terrible din ; while the burning house roars in concert, casting its ruddy light over the conflict, revealing every phase in all its details, and the crash of the heavy walls, seem in keeping with the fall of man.

Oh, what pen could portray such a scene ? The dreadful interest of the whole would absorb the particulars.

Foremost among the *Melladios* was the form of the man who had betrayed the Scarlet Shoulders—he who had enacted the part of spy to lull their suspicions—Sylva Cohecho. Sayosa recognized him, and divining the true part he had played, strove to encounter him to reward his treachery. But whether by accident or design, in this he was baffled, for sometime, as was also Lucas Planillas.

The traitor seemed to bear a charmed life, and as his long, powerful arms wielded a heavy sword, he cut down or beat off all who attacked him, until at length Marcos found himself face to face with the spy.

"Accursed dog, I have met you at last, and now you will never play the spy again!" hissed the young miner, as he aimed a heavy, downright blow at his foe, but which slid harmlessly from the *machete* of Cohecho.

"Bah ! you crow loud for a chicken that has not yet grown his spurs," taunted the ruffian, as he returned the compliment. "Señor Estevan Despierto will not have you for a rival with 'na Carlita, after to-night."

"I shall live to see the *coyotes* poisoned by *your* carcass, at any rate."

The tumult was constantly increasing in the city, and was rapidly nearing the scene of the conflict; but the combatants did not heed that. The long-smothered rage and rivalry between the partisans had now broken bounds, and it must be a strong barrier that would be able to stay its course. Although blood had been spilled upon more than one occasion by the factions, it was only in solitary instances, settled rather as a duel between enemies than a partisan affair. But now the revolt had come to a head, and nothing but the complete defeat of one party could check the riots, unless, indeed, a military force should arrive sufficiently strong to *compel* peace—an event that was far from likely.

At this point of the contest, a crowd of armed men arrived upon the scene, and, with loud shouts of "Los Rayas forever!" "Down with the *Melladios*!" they plunged into the *melee*, and the next minute the enemy broke, and fled in every direction, darting into the gloom that was rendered more intense by the contrast with the ruddy glow of the still burning building, closely pursued by the victorious miners.

The rescuing party of Scarlet Shoulders who had arrived so opportunely, had been closely followed by the police and military force; but these prudently awaited until the battle-field was comparatively clear, when they boldly advanced and arrested several of the victors and a few wounded. But the cry for rescue was quickly set up, and the miners promptly rallied, with wild yells, and charged the troops. These latter worthies, deeming valor the better part of discretion, abandoned their captives and fled for their lives, seeing the folly of attempting a resistance.

The rioters well knew what penalty awaited them if they should become known, and collecting their wounded, speedily vanished to place them in security. But the affair was not yet over, as they well knew. The defeated *Melladios* would collect reinforcements, and another effort would be made to retrieve their lost honor.

CHAPTER V.

THE RESCUE.

THE rioting and confusion did not entirely cease, although, owing to the retreat of the *Melladios*, it was but in an idle and desultory way, either among themselves or the police of the town. These last worthies, after one or two *rencontres*, left the city to the tender mercies of the victors, and sought safety in flight. But as many of the Rayas miners had families or friends living in the place, the principal source of danger was to be dreaded from the *Melladios* attempting to storm the city.

So the night wore on ; fresh recruits coming in from time to time to join the Scarlet Shoulders under Marcos Sayosa, until he had a body of hardy, resolute men strong enough to make him have little doubt as to his being able to hold his own against whatever force might be brought against him. So, instead of fortifying any of the buildings, he contented himself with posting sentinels around the town, with attendants to carry the news in case any enemy should appear.

The few hours that intervened before daylight he spent in searching for Despierto, but without success. Whether he was dead, a prisoner, or had fled, he could only conjecture, but for the time his vengeance must be deferred.

About the middle of the forenoon a strong body of the *Melladios* appeared in view at some distance from the city, and Marcos Sayosa, at the head of the majority of his men, sallied out to give them battle. As they came within gunshot, a volley was exchanged, but without material effect, and the *Melladios* retreated before the impetuous charge of the Scarlet Shoulders, who pressed forward at speed with wild hurrahs of victory.

But then Sayosa hurriedly ordered them to halt, turning his face anxiously toward the town. They could hear the rapid reports of firearms and faint shouting, while the thin, sulphurous smoke could be seen rising above the housetops.

Then they comprehended the trap they had fallen into ;

that the *Melladios* had signally outwitted them. They knew then the reason why the enemy had so suddenly and strangely retreated without joining, hand to hand. It was their object to draw the main force, if not all of the Scarlet Shoulders, from the advantageous position they held, under cover of the houses, and keep them employed while another body took possession of the city.

The plot was well laid, and a few more minutes would have insured its success, if, indeed, it had not been already accomplished. Sayosa knew that his only hope was to gain the city before his comrades were overpowered, or, placed between two fires, he would stand a fair chance of being cut to pieces.

"Back, *comarados*, back to the city! Never mind those *ladrones*; *anda—anda!*" he shouted, and darted forward at the top of his speed, closely followed by his men, all fully sensible that nothing but celerity of action and desperate fighting could repair the folly they had been led into.

Then the tables were turned. The pursued became the pursuers—the chasers chased. Each man strained every nerve, and ran as he had never ran before. The one to reach the city in time to assist their beleaguered comrades, the other to overtake and force the Scarlet Shoulders into a struggle that would detain them until the other division of the *Melladios* should have accomplished their mission.

Two men were seen to run from the town, but when they saw the miners returning, sped back to announce the news to those who had dispatched them for assistance.

The pursuers and pursued were scattered over the plains—the swiftest of the former close upon the heels of the rear-most of the latter. Fortunately all firearms had been discharged, or a serious loss would have been inflicted. As it was, more than one of the Scarlet Shoulders were cut down before the city was reached.

As the fugitives swept down an angle in the street, Marcos Sayosa halted, and ordered his men to face the foe. This was promptly done, and the bright swords and scarcely less terrible knives flashed in the sunlight. Others hastily began reloading their *escopettes*.

The enemy came sweeping on, uttering their wild yells and shouts of exultation. The rearmost of the men from whose

left shoulders streamed the bright knot of ribbon, came up and fell promptly into the ranks.

Then the *Melladios* swept around the corner, and so great was their impetus that many ran headlong into the close ranks of their foes, and then the cold steel began its work. Almost without resistance a score of the leaders were cut down, and then, while the remainder faltered at the sudden and unexpected resistance, the loud, clear tones of Sayosa rung out the order to charge!

And right bravely was his call responded to. Sounding their war-cry : " Rayas forever—down with the *Melladios* !" the Scarlet Shoulders rushed into the confused mass of men, and for a few brief minutes the blood flowed like water.

The enemy quickly rallied and fought desperately, but the momentary surprise had been fatal to their chance of successful resistance. Outnumbered and without order, they sustained the fearful onset for a time, and then, pressed back, slowly giving way, foot by foot, at first, and then more rapidly, until at length they turned on their heels and fled in despair, closely pursued by the victorious Scarlet Shoulders. But Marcos Sayosa sounded the recall, that was obeyed, and just in time.

Their comrades who had been left in the town now appeared in view, being driven back by their assailants. Sullenly and with desperate courage they fought the overpowering force of *Melladios*, stubbornly contending the ground inch by inch, borne back, not by superior bravery, but by mere force of numbers. But one man turned to flee in affright, and he was promptly cut down by one of his comrades.

Then sounding their war-cry, the victorious division of the Scarlet Shoulders pressed forward to the rescue, and the tug of war commenced. The *Melladios*, flushed with success, would not retreat, although now outnumbered, and the street was filled with the clash of steel and the horrible din of a death struggle. But the scale was turned by the miners of Rayas, the band who had reloaded their firearms, and at close quarters poured in a withering volley, some of the victims being scorched by the burning powder.

This started the retreat, and then began a bloody running fight from one end of the city to the other. Three several times did the fugitives rally and strive nobly to retrieve their lost

fortunes, but in vain. They were overmatched, and finally broke in every direction, each man fleeing as choice impelled him, only intent upon escaping the avengers who stood in their footpaths.

The pursuit was continued by the main body for several miles, and when they abandoned it a few still persisted. Marcos Sayosa led his triumphant band back to the town, and retiring to the house he had selected as his quarters for the present, with his officers, they deliberated as to what should be their future course. They well knew that should their identity become known, and they were captured by the military, there could be but one ending. And some hours they argued *pro* and *con*, without coming to any definite conclusion. They knew that in a short time the fugitive military would return with reinforcements, against which they would stand but a faint chance of making a successful resistance, even were they mad enough to attempt it.

The city was gloomy enough. The main street was still scattered with the dead and wounded miners, lying as they fell. The houses were all closed and barred, the inhabitants most likely trembling lest their doors should be forced and their wealth, perhaps even life, be taken. Several *posadas* had been forced open, and the Scarlet Shoulders were fast becoming uproarious over the confiscated wines and liquors.

The young captain was standing with Lucas Planillas and several others upon the *azotea*, still in consultation, when Sayosa suddenly paused, and, shading his eyes with his hand, peered keenly toward the south-west. The form of a single horseman was riding at a break-neck speed toward the city, while on the rising ground far beyond him could faintly be distinguished the light cloud either produced by a fire or the discharging of guns.

"*Voto a Dios, 'nor* Lucas, but I believe there is mischief going on yonder. Surely a fight is going on; perhaps some of our *comarados* are in trouble. Go you and see what the *cavallero* is spurring so fast for, and let us know as soon as possible;" and then, as Planillas departed upon his errand, Marcos turned to his companions, and added:

"*Cavalleros*, we may be needed yonder. See how many horses you can find before the lieutenant returns, and one of

you pass the word for the men to be in readiness to march, if needs be."

As he turned toward the point where the horseman had been seen, he found that Planillas had just met him, and, after a few moments, during which, apparently, a few explanations were given, the man dismounted, and Don Lucas, vaulting into the saddle, galloped on toward the headquarters. Descending the steps, Sayosa awaited his approach, and, when within call, exclaimed :

" Well, *amigo*, what is it?"

" We are needed out yonder. There is an escort guarding some ladies that have been attacked by a band of *Melladios*, who outnumber them two to one. They have sent to ask assistance. Will you go?"

" *Cascaras*, yes! Go you and start what men you can find on foot. We will follow as soon as horses can be got. In a few moments," hastily returned Marcos.

In two minutes the majority of the Scarlet Shoulders were *en route* on the double-quick toward the scene of the struggle, and three more saw about a score of horsemen, including the leaders, spur out from the city, well mounted upon confiscated horses that quickly carried them past the footmen, who were ordered to push on at top speed for the rescue.

The reason for the miners being all upon foot is not fully known, when perhaps there was not a man in the band but what owned one or more horses. But partly from policy, and partly from being ignorant of the period of the intended attack by the *Melladios*, such was the case.

- In ten minutes the horsemen had reached the scene of the surprise, and were none too soon, for the *peons* were fast falling before the more numerous army of the assailants, and, although fighting desperately, were being forced back. At their head fought a tall, handsome cavalier, bare-headed and blood-stained, but whose saber drank blood at every stroke, while the rearing and plunging of his snorting horse helped to keep him free from the mass of miners that swarmed around him.

With a loud cheer of encouragement, the little band of horsemen plunged into the *melee*, and joined the leader, who welcomed them with a cry of pleasure. Still they were greatly outnumbered, and, although encouraged by the accession, the

peons fought with renewed energy, it was all they could do to hold their own against the raging mass. Time and time again did the horsemen charge among the enemy, beating them back with the desperate onset, yet each time the miners closed around them, and they had to cut their way out again, gradually losing some of their number, either by death or by being unhorsed.

The work was all done with the cold steel. There was no time to reload their firearms, and perhaps it was well that such was the case. The *peons* were ranged around a sort of coach, or close carriage, in which were the ladies, and obstinately retained their position, although so closely pressed that it seemed a miracle they were not annihilated. The bodies of their horses, and the ones which had drawn the carriage, were lying where they had been shot at the first onset.

Then with wild yells the foremost of the Scarlet Shoulders came up and poured a withering volley of musket balls into the close ranks of the *Melladois*. In the excitement their approach had not been noticed, or was unheeded. In a moment the struggle was changed, and with yells of dismay, the miners broke in confusion and fled from the spot.

"*Andela, comarados, andela!*" shouted Marcos Sayosa. "Give the cursed ladrones no quarter; give them a lesson they will not forget soon!"

The Scarlet Shoulders pressed hotly after the fleeing *Melladios*, fulfilling to the letter the order given them. Marcos Sayosa alone remained behind. The cavalier already mentioned was at the side of the carriage, and opening the door, eagerly exclaimed :

"Mother—Luisa, are you safe and unhurt?"

"Yes, yes, Felipe; but you? My God, you are killed!"

"No, it is only a scratch—nothing; a little cut from a *machete*, that is all. Thank the Virgin you are safe! I thought it was all over with us, when this *cavallero* came up," and he turned to where the young miner sat upon his horse, wrapping his scarf around a severe gash in his left arm.

"Pardon me, senor, if I neglected you for a moment. But this is my mother and sister, and they might have been injured."

"You were perfectly right, 'nor *cavallero*, and no apologies are needed. But if you will be so kind as to knot this troublesome scarf, I will remain your debtor," returned Marcos.

"No, brother; it was for us that he received it, let *me* fasten it," interrupted a musical voice from the carriage, and as the speaker looked forth, Sayosa gave a start of mingled admiration and wonder that called up a deeper blush to the cheek of Luisa Canelo, that made her still more charming.

"A thousand pardons, *senorita*, but I am a rough, unpolished miner, and the sight of such loveliness confused me. I really thought that an angel—there, see, I have sinned again!" he added, with a slight laugh of confusion, as he saw the effect of his words.

"It is a sin then that my sister has often provoked," said Felipe, feeling slightly annoyed. "But pardon, again. This is my mother and sister. I am Felipe Canelo."

"And I am called Marcos Sayosa," added the young partisan, as the other paused, "a poor miner at your service," bowing first to the man and then the ladies, who politely acknowledged the salute.

"But see, your arm still bleeds. Allow me to bind it up," said Luisa, and as the miner rode up to the carriage, her fairy fingers deftly fastened the bandage, while her face flushed hotly beneath the admiring but respectful gaze of Sayosa.

On the opposite side Felipe was undergoing the same process at the hands of his mother. The latter seemed puzzled at some thought, and glanced curiously at the young miner, who never looked handsomer than at that moment, although his attire was somewhat stained and disordered by the adventures he had so recently passed through. The tumults within his breast had not yet died away, but the fierce ardor of battle that glowed in every feature and flashed in his eye, was tempered by the sight of the beautiful maiden who was so tenderly ministering to his wound.

He had never before met with so much beauty and grace centered in one woman, and there was a strange sensation about his heart that should have warned him such company would be far more dangerous to his peace of mind than the weapons that had so lately been playing around him were to his body. But not then did he think of this. He would have been either more or less than man, had he done so.

As Luisa put the last touch upon the bandage, Canelo came around the coach, and addressed the miner:

"Senor Don Sayosa, can you tell me if I can procure horses in the city? Ours are all dead or fled but my own bay, and we must get to shelter soon."

"The city, senor, is no place for ladies now, but I think I can help you. Last night the miners from Mellado attacked us of Los Rayas, and the city officers have all fled the town. I command the men you saw, and they will be like wild beasts from blood and drink," he added, as Felipe was about to interrupt him. "But if you desire it, I will select a band on whom I can depend, and guard you until you are beyond all danger. As we disband to-day, I fear I could do but little with the mass to-night."

"Well, then, we will accept the offer as freely as 'tis made, for you do not paint a very pleasant or reassuring picture. But the horses?"

"I will send an order to my men who remained at the city, if you can dispatch a couple of *peons* with it. They will send horses, although I fear your followers will have to travel on foot."

"They can, until we reach some place where I can purchase mounts."

In the course of half an hour the two *peons* returned from the city, each astride of a stout, serviceable horse, and by stripping the dead ones of their harness, the carriage was soon in readiness for the road. Some little time was consumed in waiting for the return of the desired Scarlet Shoulders, but at length two score were selected upon whom Sayosa knew he could depend. After a consultation with Lucas Planillas, his lieutenant, the young miner deputed the command to him, both to disband and arrange the necessary signals by which they could be recalled, if necessary; the coach started and rolled rapidly along the sandy road, surrounded by the escort.

Owing to the sand cast by the wheels the windows were closed, and although Felipe and Marcos rode close to the sides, all conversation was checked except between themselves; although more than once the young miner caught the great black eyes of Luisa glancing toward him, and then it would be difficult indeed to tell which one was the most confused.

CHAPTER VI.

CARLITA.

THE sun set and twilight ensued, but for a brief space. The moon was near its full, and arose nearly as soon as its more brilliant brother had disappeared, and in that clear atmosphere its light rendered objects with nearly the distinctness of noon-day.

In perhaps an hour after sunset the party halted for supper, there fortunately being enough stowed behind the coach in a hamper for a tolerable meal. Then for the first time Marcos Sayosa heard the cause of the journey and residence of the party he had been so fortunate in rescuing.

They had been on a visit to some friends at the city of Mexico for a couple of weeks, and had got thus far upon their return home, intending to pause for the night at Guanajuato, when they were attacked by the *Melladios*, who had ambushed themselves in a shallow ditch, being part of the band repulsed by Marcos on the edge of the town, as already detailed.

Marcos seemed wonderfully attracted by Dona Luisa, while she, in return, appeared to feel the same influence, although much less plainly shown. Still, it did not escape the notice of her mother and Felipe. The latter especially seemed ill at ease, and hovered close to his sister, acting more like a lover than the relation he held toward her. But he heard nothing at which he could take offense; every word spoken by Marcos was respectful, almost reverential; but his tones evinced his sincerity, telling that if not in love, he was not very far from that most delightful state.

After an hour's rest the company again started, intending to travel the greater part of the night. The wind had died away, and as the night was warm and pleasant, the carriage windows were let down, and a desultory conversation was kept up by the four persons. During it Sayosa received a cordial invitation to pay the Canelos' *hacienda* a visit, so warmly pressed that when Luisa added her soft voice, he accepted it, though not without some inward misgivings as to

the wiseness of throwing himself in the way of temptation, when presented in such a bewitching form as Luisa Canelo. He knew too well that it would be presumptuous in him to think of her for his bride, and would not that be the result?

Toward morning they again halted, and at daybreak Sayosa and his followers took their leave, as now there could be no further danger, and that day would see them safe at the *hacienda*. The men were not allowed to depart without a liberal reward from Felipe, and probably not one regretted the duty that had been forced upon them.

The party separated, Marcos riding off by himself on a course that would carry him considerably to the left of Guanajuato. He rode slowly along, little heeding what course he took, with his mind in utter confusion. The sentences that he muttered from time to time told the subjects of his thoughts. They were of Luisa Canelo and *love*. He pshawed and pished at the idea of being in love with her, but this very fact showed that there was some foundation for the surmise.

"Bah! what a fool I am getting to be," he exclaimed, impatiently, "thinking of her in this way! As if she would look at me in my station, except as one who had done her a slight service! I half expected they would offer me gold, to pay me for my trouble. But, they did not; perhaps they understood me too well. And then—am I not pledged? Yes, and to one who can compare favorably with even the proud Senorita Canelo—my Carlita! I love her; surely I do, and yet—bah, I am a fool, and worse!" he muttered, as tightening the reins, he applied his spurs, and galloped swiftly over the prairie.

With but a short pause at noon to allow his horse necessary rest, he rode rapidly until late in the afternoon, passing Guanajuato, and finally reached a small stream that ran through a group of trees. Dismounting, he led the animal along a narrow path, with the relieved air of a man who was at his journey's end. Suddenly he paused.

A shrill, piercing shriek rung out upon the still air, closely followed by another; then came the hoarse tones of a man.

Relinquishing the bridle and drawing a pistol, Marcos sprung forward toward the point from whence the alarm

sounded. He knew full well the owner of the first voice, and a cold, chilling hand seemed grasping his heart, as he thought of her danger—she to whom he had given his first love and pledged his hand—Carlita.

Running through the undergrowth, regardless of the thorns that lacerated his flesh, he plunged into a little glade. Two forms met his gaze—a man and a woman, or rather a young girl. She was struggling wildly in his grasp, with her face toward the point where approached the young miner, and as she caught sight of him, cried out imploringly :

"Save me, Marcos; save me for the love of our Virgin!"

Sayosa dared not fire, for fear of hitting the maiden, and leaped forward with an angry howl of rage. But the maiden's call had alarmed the man, and as he saw Marcos, he dropped the girl, and with one leap was hidden in the undergrowth, closed followed by a bullet from the young miner's pistol.

For a moment Marcos hesitated, but then the sight of the pale, motionless Carlita, who lay where she had fallen, decided him, and dropping to his knees beside her, he pressed his hand to her heart. With a fervent shout of joy he felt it flutter, and knew that she had only fainted. Quickly filling his *sombrero* with the clear, sparkling water, he plentifully sprinkled her face with it, and in a few moments she opened her eyes, to his great joy.

"Where is he—that fearful man? Oh, Marcos, is it you? I am so glad!" murmured Carlita, as she closed her eyes again, and nestled still to his breast.

"Do not think of it, *mi alma*," returned Marcos, pressing a kiss upon her damp brow. "He is gone and will trouble you no more. But that I could not leave you then, he would be food for the *coyotes* and *zopilotes* before now."

"Ah, no, Marcos, he is a terrible man. Promise me you will not seek him; he would kill you!" shuddered Carlita.

"Do you know him, darling? Tell me how it happened."

"But you will not fight him? Remember, you are all I have to love now upon earth, excepting poor father."

"Well, never mind now," said Marcos, "but tell me how he came to molest you."

"It is not the first time he has met me, but never before

did he venture to touch me, although he said horrible, dreadful things," murmured the girl, hiding her face and sobbing.

"But his name?" repeated Sayosa, a little sternly.

"I do not know it, but I saw him first at the fandango last month. You remember? He came up and spoke to you."

"Ha, I suspected it!" exclaimed the young miner. "Was there no mark by which you would know him; on his face, I mean?"

"Yes; a small, dark-blue spot just over his eye—the left, I think."

"Go on; tell me all. It is as I thought; and I spared his life, the cursed hound!" gritted Sayosa.

"He met me first about two weeks after that, and spoke in a way that frightened me; as if he—loved me—"

"And you never told me?" demanded the miner, a little sternly.

"Pardon me, Marcos; I was afraid. You know how brave you are, and I thought if you knew, you might get hurt," pleaded Carlita. Then, as he did not speak, she continued more rapidly: "Once afterward I saw him, and he spoke the same, but I left him without an answer. Then today I was walking along the *arroyo*, wondering why you did not come, when he suddenly stepped before me, and as I turned to run, he frightened me so, he caught hold of my arm and held me fast. Then he said something worse than all, that I thought would kill me, and as I screamed he caught me in his arms and tried to drag me away, when you came."

"I understand; but, Carlita, darling, you did very wrong in not telling me when he first insulted you, and then this would not have happened. He is a dissolute, unprincipled villain, and I shudder at what might have been your fate if I had not arrived as I did," chided Sayosa. "But come, let us go to the house. Is *tio Tomas* at home?"

"No. He went away just before noon, but he should be back by this time," and then they crossed the *arroyo* on a foot-bridge, of a tree that had been felled over to span the little stream, and approached the house, or rather *jacale*, for it was no better.

Its walls were composed of the split trunks of the arborescent yucca, set stockade fashion in the ground, while its roof

was a thatch furnished by the long, bayonet-shaped leaves of the same gigantic lily. The interstices between the uprights, instead of being "chinked" with clay, as is common among the lower class of peasants, was wattled with a species of heavy grass or reed.

The form of a man, old and enfeebled from age and sickness, sat upon a rude stool just within the doorway, smoking a pipe, slowly ejecting the fragrant vapor through his thin nostrils, his head leaning against the side of the door, with closed eyes and a faint smile of intense enjoyment playing around his mouth, that told plainly he was a lover of the narcotic weed.

If looks were a criterion, he was already past the age allotted to man. His face was one mass of wrinkles; the hair was white as snow, and made but a thin, narrow fringe around his crown, like the shaven poll of a monk. He had been very tall, but now his form was like a bent bow, the chin resting upon his chest, giving him the appearance of being hump-backed. Such was Tomas Ventura, better known as *tio*, or uncle Tomas.

The wolf-like dog that lay at his feet leaped up and ran to welcome the young couple, arousing the old man, who, when he saw what was the cause, signified his pleasure by rubbing his bony hands together and calling out in a shrill, cracked voice:

"Ah, Marcos, my son, you are as welcome as the first drop of rain. But where have you been so long? and see, the boy is hurt! Look at the blood. Is it bad, Marcos, is it bad?"

"A few scratches, *tio* Tomas, nothing more," was the hasty reply, for he noted the sudden start of alarm given by Carlita, who had been so excited by the adventure she had met with, that she did not notice he had been wounded before.

"But how was it, child, how did it happen? In a duel?" persisted Ventura, with the curiosity of old age.

"No," hesitated Marcos, for it was partially from that cause, as the reader knows, but he did not wish Carlita to learn of that just at present; "it was with the *Melladios*. They attacked us of the Scarlet Shoulders night before last."

"Ah, the accursed dogs! But you beat them; say that you beat the cowardly *ladrones!*!" eagerly cried the old man.

"Ay, that we did!" laughed Sayosa, "and so thoronghly that they will rest satisfied for a year to come. But, dear Carlita, you must change your clothes. It is getting chilly," he added, as they entered the house.

"*Santissima Virgin*, she is all wet! Did you fall into the *arroyo, nina?*?" anxiously queried Ventura, for the first time noting the condition of his daughter.

"No, not that, uncle, but worse," returned Marcos. "Come out of doors and I will tell you all."

In a few words he narrated the insult given by Estevan Despierto, the duel, and then his dastardly conduct to Carlita, with the assault from which she had just been delivered; for, from the peculiarity mentioned by Carlita, he had recognized Despierto as the villain. The blue spot, left by a pistol-shot that had been discharged so close to his face that the burnt powder had penetrated the skin, was an indelible brand.

"*Madre de Soledad!* and I so near!" murmured the father. "So near, and not know of my child's danger! But he did not—you saved her from all harm?"

"Excepting a bad affright."

"Thank God it was you. But listen. My Carlita is beautiful and good—even a father may say that—and she loves you, better far than life itself. And you—can you, do you love her?" anxiously asked Ventura.

"Yes; I do, I *will* love her, best of all!" exclaimed Marcos, but there was a remonstrance at his heart; the bright, beautiful face of Luisa Canelo was there, and seemed to reproach him for the words.

"I hoped so—I *knew* so; and I am glad. I am an old man, Marcos, and, as you know, very poor. But you saved my daughter; she who looks at me with her mother's eyes, and I shall not forget it. Listen. I can not live much longer; I feel that I must soon die, although it is sorrow and care—remorse, not age, that has made me what I am. I am not much over fifty years of age, but I look nearer a hundred. You wonder, but it is true. And when I die—after I am dead, you will be rich. Yes, rich as a prince—a prince, Marcos!"

"Never mind that now, uncle; we will talk it over some other time. Let us return to the *jacale*," soothingly replied Sayosa, as he took the old man's arm, thinking that the tale of Carlita's peril had shocked his brain; for the neighbors all called him "crazy Ventura," and the youth partially shared their belief that the old man was of unsound mind.

"No, no, Marcos, my son, you are wrong," said Ventura. "I am not wandering; my brain is not crazed. Although the blessed Virgin knows that I have endured enough to make me so. I am speaking the truth when I say that if you marry Carlita, after I am gone, you will be wealthy; with gold that you could not count in a lifetime, and lands where you may gallop all day long, in a straight line, without touching an inch of ground that does not call you master."

"Well, let us go to the house, for I am fearfully hungry. I have not eaten a mouthful of food since last night," lightly returned Sayosa.

"*Por Dios*, is it so? Then come, hasten; my poor boy, you must be starving," cried Ventura, and the two men were soon eating a hearty meal, prepared by the little brown hands of Carlita.

She was a tiny, fairy-like creature, but with an admirably modeled form, of exquisite grace and beauty. She had the large, lustrous black eyes that are seen only to perfection in Mexico, but more especially in the valley of Jalapa. Her hair was worn rather short, curling in masses around her small head and graceful neck, glossy as the plumage of a raven, and with the same blue-black sheen. Her arms, hand, tiny-slipped foot and trim ankle were matchless even among the ones to whom such charms are hereditary. And although so young in years, but little past her *buen quince* (beautiful fifteen), she was a fully-developed woman. Those years passed under the sun of a Southern sky are what two or three and twenty are in our temperate climate.

Her father had appeared at their present situation when she was yet an infant, and although, from the great contrast between the two, it was hinted they were not of such close relationship, yet he was her father.

With them had came a boy, Marcos Sayosa, who had been taught to call the one uncle and the other cousin. But when

he grew older and began to ask about his parents, Tomás Ventura told him that he was not a nephew, or, indeed, any relation whatever. That a man and woman had come to his house, asking shelter, where he had been born. The father was badly wounded in the conflict with banditti in which they had lost their all, excepting the clothes they wore, and had managed to escape and wander to his hut. The man died of his wounds, and after Marcos' birth his mother sunk rapidly from grief for her husband, and on the third day she also died. They were buried side by side, and Ventura determined to adopt the child, calling it after its father's name, and had done so, rearing him as though he was of his own flesh and blood, although it was a constant struggle with him to obtain food for the mouths of those dependent upon him.

This was the story that Marcos had heard. Who or what his parents were he could not learn. They had been robbed of every thing—not even a scrap of paper was to be found—and in their woful condition Ventura had not ventured to question them; and no clue, excepting the one name, was dropped from their lips.

With this Sayosa was forced to be content, and as his years increased, he learned to love the sweet Carlita, and she him. They were pledged to each other, and until the hour in which he met Luisa Canelo, he had thoughts for none other. But now he was bewildered, and knew not what to do. Although he declared to himself that he loved Carlita, and her only, his thoughts would wander to Luisa, and her image was far oftener present to his mind than he would have cared to admit.

CHAPTER VII.

FELIPE'S VISITOR.

"WELL, Pepe, what is it?" a little impatiently asked Felipe Canelo, as a *vaquero* paused at the entrance of the little arbor within which he was seated with Luisa.

"*Un papelqio, mi amo,*" respectfully answered Pepe, as he presented a folded note to the young man, and then resumed his former position as it was being perused.

Luisa's eyes were fixed upon her brother's face, and the change in it was so sudden and strange, that she could not suppress an exclamation of alarm. His face blanched to an ashen white, and his form shook as though he had an ague-fit, while there was a wild, half-crazed glare in his eyes, that frightened her, she scarce knew why. But the sound of her voice recalled Felipe to his senses, and with an effort he regained his composure sufficiently to speak coherently.

"It is nothing, Luisa, darling. It is from an old friend that I thought was dead, and the unexpected sight of his name shocked me; that is all," he muttered, as stooping, he pressed a kiss upon her cheek. "But, Pepe, where is the gentleman who gave you this; I must see him," he added, as he saw that the *vaquero* still stood at the door.

"He awaits you at the first clump of *magueys* on the *arroyo maduro*, *senor*, just below the ford. I met him there and he asked me to give you *el papelaio*. But pardon, master, shall I not go with you? He is a wild, rough-looking person, more like a *salteador* than an honest man," urged the *vaquero*.

"No, Pepe; he means no mischief, and even if he did, it is not one man who would get the better of me," laughed Felipe, but it was in a constrained manner. "Go now, and saddle Peralta, and fasten him at the gate. I will be there in five minutes. Come, Luisa, let us return to the house," he added, taking her arm and leaving the arbor.

"Felipe—brother, do not go to that man. I know that something dreadful will happen if you do," pleaded Luisa.

"But I must go, or he would come here, and—"

"But that would be better; then where there were so many around, he would not harm you," interrupted the maiden, eagerly.

"Not for the world would—I mean it would not be pleasant, sister; at least, just at present," stammered Felipe. "And there is no danger. Besides, I shall go armed. So say no more about it, and when I come back we will laugh heartily over your foolish fancies," he added, lightly.

Luisa said no more, for she saw that he was determined to go, and in a few moments he was in the saddle, well armed, and galloping swiftly toward the point designated. As he rode up, he uttered the shrill, thrilling whistle of the red-tailed

hawk, and in a few moments the signal was answered from the grove of *moquet*, and a horseman rode from out among the underbrush that surrounded the tall plants.

He was a tall, stalwart man, with features regular enough, but upon them was the brand of crime and fearful passion. Pepe, the *vaquero*, had spoken truly when he described the stranger as a "wild, rough-looking man." He was such a man as one would instinctively shun if in a lone place, and feel more at ease when he was out of sight.

The two men, so dissimilar in appearance, were soon deeply engaged in consultation, and did not notice that there was an intruder near them, and one, too, that was listening eagerly to their every word, his countenance betraying the intense interest it occasioned him. He was concealed behind a dense stunted bush, or rather *in* a little clump, not more than a score of feet distant, with his eye at one opening and ear at another, carefully parting the leaves with his hands, so as to hear everything, while the slightly-fluttering leaves fully screened his face from view.

That it was a secret topic they were discussing was plainly evidenced by the continual glances that were cast around them, as if to guard against espial or interruption, but they were directed beyond where the spy was crouched. Perhaps an hour afterward the two men separated, Felipe riding homeward slowly, the stranger galloping rapidly off toward Guanajuato.

When they moved out of sight the spy arose, and looking toward the point where the latter had disappeared, clenched his fist and shook it vindictively, hissing between his closed teeth as he did so.

"Beware, Senor Don Lopez Romulo. I know you now, and your precious secret! And I will foil you, so sure as the sun shines; yes, and test my *cuchillo* on your ribs before many days. *Santissima Virgin!* can it be true?" he added, in a changed voice, as he sat down again, and resting his head upon his hand, sunk into a deep fit of musing that lasted until the sun had set.

"Yes, that will do, I think. At least I will try. But Don Felipe? *Sangre de Christo!* it must be so; else they would not have been so cautious. Poor Senora Canelo!" he mut-

tered, as he strode rapidly toward the *hacienda*, taking a round-about course, so as to enter it upon the opposite side from that whence Felipe had ridden.

It was at an early hour of the night of the succeeding day to that on which Felipe had met his strange visitor, that this same man, or Lopez Romulo as the spy had termed him, entered a low, fifth-rate *cabaret* near the suburbs of Guanajuato. His soft, felt hat was slouched over his eyes, and the muffling folds of his coarse woolen *bayeta* shrouded the lower portion of his face, only leaving a narrow aperture, from which gleamed a large black eye. After a quick glance around the room, he dropped his cloak, and spoke to the *patrone*.

"Senor Don Sanchez, if a *cavallero* asks for me by the name you know, be so kind as to direct him to my table. Stop. Have you any acquaintance with Don Sylva Cohecho?"

"Carajo! yes; more than I could wish. He owes me for two nights' drinking, and what a head he has got, to be sure! He said you would see me paid."

"Very good. Include it with my bill. Send a bottle of wine and some cigarettes—not like the bundle you gave me the other day, or I will ram them down my pistol and use your head for a target."

"I comprehend your excellency," grinned the *patrone*, significantly. "You were a stranger then, and I did not expect to see you again. It was all in the way of business, you see. But no offense, I trust?"

"None. You rob the traveler in one way, I in another; ha, ha!" laughed Romulo, as he passed to the further end of the vacant room, where he seated himself at a small table.

The host, when he brought the ordered articles, removed the two nearest stands to a distance, so that any thing said in a moderate tone by Lopez or his expected friend could not be overheard. After the elapse of an hour, perhaps, half of the tables were occupied, and then Sylva Cohecho, the repulsive-looking scoundrel who had betrayed Marcos Sayosa and his comrades of the Scarlet Shoulders to the *Melladios*, entered, and was directed to where Romulo was sitting. He was greeted with a careless, half-contemptuous nod by the latter, who did not deign to move the cigarette from between his lips.

" You wished to see me, 'nor capitán?'"

" On business, yes; for pleasure, no," returned Lopez, not noting the flash of anger that shot from beneath the shaggy, pent-house eyebrows of his comrade. " I have work for you to do, of that kind which pleases you the most. There is a certain man that I wish put out of the way; a blow of the *cuchillo* will do. And the sooner it is done the greater will be your pay. He has deeply insulted me, and as it was at a place and time that I could not resent it then, I ask you. But that matters not. When you have done this, we will be ready to begin the business that brought us here."

" And the person's name is—?"

" One Marcos Sayosa, a miner of Los Rayas, and, I have heard, the chief of those who call themselves Scarlet Shoulders," returned the captain.

" Good, and at the same time I can discharge the little sum he owes me!" exclaimed Cohecho, clutching his long knife vindictively.

" Ah, you know him, then?"

For reply Don Sylva narrated the adventures of the night on which he had played the spy.

" Your headstrong folly will ruin both yourself and my plans, yet; not that the first would matter much, because the sooner the *zopilotes* feed upon your hideous carcass the better; but until this affair is over, remember your life belongs to me, and you must keep as much in the dark as possible. Supposing some of those miners should meet you again—for they will not soon forget such a marvel of grace and beauty as you are—their first greeting would be either a stab or a pistol bullet," angrily muttered Lopez, as he refilled his glass.

" *Carrai!* but that's a two-handed game," returned Cohecho. " And they have all returned to work at the mines, so there is no danger of that. But about this Sayosa?"

" You will receive five hundred *pesos*, if you bring me satisfactory proof that he is dead; but beware how you act. If you try to deceive me, I wear a knife that has stilled the breath of better men than you, and perhaps you know my hand never misses its aim," answered Romulo, significantly.

"*Voto al demonios, 'nor capitán,* where is the need of threats? Have I ever played you false?"

"Not to my knowledge. If you had, you would not be sitting here now."

"He is your enemy, and mine also. I shall claim the money within the week, perhaps before another night. But the other—"

"Is an altogether different affair. You will be paid for it, as I told you, just as soon as the work is done."

"*Carambo, it is beautiful!*" murmured the ruffian, in a joyful tone. "After this I shall set up a *monte* bank, and roll in gold—the sweet, darling gold!"

"Yes; after, but not yet. Do not let your *chiripe* turn your brain or steal away the little sense you have got," sneered Don Lopez, as he lighted another cigarette.

"Pardon, 'nor capitán, I was dreaming. But did you see this Don Felipe Canelo?" returned Cohecho.

"*Mil diablos, zarayote,* why do you speak that name?" exclaimed Lopez, ferociously. "What do you know about him?"

"Nothing—nothing at all," drawing a little back from the table, as if in expectation of an attack. "I only thought—"

"*Carrai!*" hissed Romulo. "You have no right to think of any thing or in any way but as I bid you. And the better you obey me in this, the longer will be your life. *Por los santos*" (by all the saints), "if I hear that name from your thick lips, or hear your tongue even hint at it, I will tear it out by the roots and feed it to the *coyotes*."

"I hear you, 'nor Romulo, and will heed your *hint*."

"See that you do. I never warn twice."

"Have you any further orders?"

"None; except that you be here to-morrow night, to report progress in the first affair. Then you can attend to this miner, Sayosa."

"*Muy bueno!* But, 'nor capitán, I must have some money. I spent the last *ocharo* to-night," hinted Sylva.

"*Voto a brios, picaro,* do you think I am a gold mine?" fumed the choleric Lopez. "Here, take this, and be a little less free in your riotings," at the same time shoving six golden

oncas over to the other, who eagerly clutched them, saying, as he slipped them, one by one, into his pocket :

" You wrong me, master. Remember, there are many little bribes to give that I can not avoid, and—"

" To say nothing of the *Chinas*," interrupted Lopez, as he arose from the table. " But remember ; be diligent, and meet me here at this hour to-morrow night," and he turned away, without a look of recognition for the obsequious bow of the unabashed ruffian, who then resumed his seat with an air of relief, darting a venomous glance after his master, and refilling his glass.

" Yes, you may strut and put on airs for a while longer, you cursed dog, but only for a little while. Let me once receive my gold, and then—I will give you a receipt in full ! Oh, won't it be delicious when I am free, and settle your curses and your jeers with the knife ? When I strike you to the heart, and then, as you gasp out your life at my feet, I will do as you have threatened me—pluck out your tongue and thrust it down your throat ! I could die then, perfectly happy. No, not die ; oh, no ! I shall be rich then, and with the gold you give me, I will double and double it, until I can count it by thousands of ounces ! No, no, not die ; life would be too sweet then, and I will live for years—years of pleasure and feasting. Oh, the gold, and wine, and women ! for them I will live—live forever !" murmured the hideous ruffian, as he drank repeatedly from the bottles before him, lost to the present, busied only with gorgeous images of the future.

CHAPTER VIII.

A FEARFUL PERIL.

IT was true, as Sylva Cohecho had stated, that the miners had again returned to work. The overwhelming defeat experienced by the *Melladios* had utterly awed them, and as the spies sent out by Lucas Planillas returned with the news of their resuming their everyday occupation, the Scarlet Shoulders doffed their insignia for the time being, and fell into their old routine. But there was a code of signals and a plan of com-

munication arranged, by which the band could be collected in an hour's time, whenever such a step should be deemed necessary.

We must now ask the reader to accompany us to the interior of the mine of *Los Rayas*, second only to that of *Valenciana*, in the state of Guanajuato. Its history presents a new feature in the mining system of Mexico, a brief explanation of which is necessary to a right understanding of the operations of the mining code.

Over the fertile valleys in the vicinity of Guanajuato the Cordellera rears its metaliferous crest, whose sides are veined with lodes of gold and silver, and which delivers to the *tarreta* of the miner the immense treasures of the *Veta Madre*, or Mother Vein, perhaps the richest lode of silver in the world. The striking contrast that is visible between the laborer and the miner is nowhere so apparent as in this portion of the *Bajío*, or "bottom of the valley." Humble and submissive, the Indian husbandman is at every one's mercy. The miner, haughty and independent, takes a higher rank; and this claim is justified by the importance of the duty which he performs. Obliged to submit to labor which yields him only limited results, the husbandman finishes his work in silence; while the pickax of the miner resounds, so to speak, to the end of the world, and at every stroke he is continually adding to the riches of mankind. Prosperity is not long in coming to him. The slopes of the hills, the ravines, and even the summits of the mountains swarm with a dense population, among whom the lucky finders of a new lode scatter their hard-earned money with a thoughtless liberality, and squander in one day the earnings of six months. From the French miner, Laberde, who discovered the "Mother Vein," and lavished thousands upon cathedrals, down to the meanest *peon*, the history of this bold workman has been the same.

Fortune is the only God he worships. He goes to his dangerous occupation as if specially sent there by Divine Providence; and this proud thought is, by the laws of the country, highly favored, the privilege according the title of nobility to the worker in the mines. Even at this day, he can not be dispossessed by his creditor of his mine, if he can afford to work it.

Besides a knowledge of metals to guide him in his search,

the miner must be endowed with a number of rare qualities, from that vigorous strength indispensable to one who has to raise heavy burdens, and support all day the enervating fatigue of underground work, down to activity and pliancy of limb, united with undaunted resolution and coolness. Sometimes, after toiling for a month, during which he has barely earned enough to live upon, in a week, or even in a day, he recompenses himself for his long privations. The miner then thanks Dame Fortune. He scatters his gold with a lavish hand, and returns to his work only when all his gains are exhausted.

When he strikes a *bonanza*, as a very rich portion of the vein is called, those who work in *partido*, or when a share of the proceeds is given him as wages, what he receives is often enough to keep him in comfort all his life. But such is not his nature.

Besides the grand shaft (*tiro general*) Los Rayas has two others of less magnitude, one of which reaches a depth of nearly eight hundred feet. The *tiro general*, remarkable for the diameter of its shaft, of thirty-four feet, and for its frightful depth, of almost twelve hundred feet, communicates with three principal galleries, one above the other. These shafts and galleries, together with their accessories, form the most complete set of gigantic workings that are to be found in the country. Of its vast and gloomy grandeur we shall not speak ; better pens than ours have described them. Nor of the workings continually going on in their depths.

Marcos Sayosa was there, together with his comrades. The lighted candles attached to their closely-fitting skull-caps, shining full upon their muscular, bronzed bodies, trickling with perspiration produced by labor and the close atmosphere, presented a weird picture. Just then the hoarse voice of one of the *mandones*, or overseers, called out :

"*Hla, 'nor Marcos Sayosa, a gentleman wishes to ascend the tiro general. Will you go with him ?*"

Ever willing to accommodate, the young miner signified his readiness, and began the necessary preparation, looking somewhat curiously at the stranger who was brave enough to risk the ascent upon his first visit to the mine. Another miner was assisting him to dress in a sort of jacket and trowsers, of thick wool, intended to prevent the water, that shot forth in fine rain at several places along the shaft, from penetrating his clothes.

A long stick, or baton, was used to prevent his being dashed to pieces against the rocks, by the oscillation of the rope, to which they were fastened by means of a plaited rope made from the bark of the aloe. Sayosa was about to take the post of danger, or the upper position, when the stranger spoke, in a courteous voice:

"Pardon, *cavallero*, but I wish to go first?"

"And do you know the danger?" asked the astonished miner.

"Perfectly. I have often ascended that of Fresvillo, at Zacatecas."

"Very well. If you are willing I am." But he looked curiously at the stranger, who, however, did not appear to notice this, as he was attending to his strap.

He was rather tall, well-dressed, and of a handsome form that was not impaired by his apparent age. Indeed, his lithe, springy movements did not accord with his long, gray hair and beard that almost covered his face. The gray skull cap was drawn close down to his eyebrows, and made the disguise, if such it was, perfect. For a moment Marcos was slightly suspicious; but when he heard the voice of the stranger this was lulled, and he banished all such thoughts.

The signal was now given, and the two adventurers slowly ascended into the shaft. For perhaps five minutes they advanced foot by foot, and then the horses above paused for breath. Each of the men carried a torch in his hand, but the light of which was rendered faint and uncertain by the damp vapor that arose from the subterranean recesses.

For a novice it would have been a trying situation, replete with real and imaginary dangers. Suppose the cable should break, or the strap in which they sat should slip down the rope, or become untied? There was no knot at the end to stop such. And then the fall!

To one the shaft seems to be divided into three distinct zones. At his feet a thick darkness dimmed the horror of that gulf which no eye could fathom. The very vagueness of the danger renders it tenfold more trying, while the white, tepid vapors arise slowly from the dark bottom, mounting toward them.

Close around them the torches lighted up with a smoky

glimmer the green, slime-covered rocks, cut and torn in all directions by the pickax and the wedge. As the rope slowly twisted around, or oscillated from side to side, the rough and jagged profiles appeared endowed with life, now taking the form of some fearful monster, or assuming the shape of some one of the horrible demons with which the fertile imagination of the miners had peopled the bowels of the earth—guardian spirits of the countless wealth, and by the illusion of a fanciful brain, excited at the novel position, they appeared to be moving stealthily around to gain your rear, and one half closes his eyes with the momentary expectation of receiving its leap.

In the upper region a dense column of thick mist pressed around the circle of light cast by the torches, shutting one completely out from the light of day. It is a trying ordeal, even to a strong mind, and yet it has its charm.

Then the ascent was resumed and the visions vanished. The stranger now lighted a bundle of tow, steeped in pitch, at his torch, and dropped it down the shaft. Their eyes could scarcely follow it, as it slowly descended the pit, like a globe of fire, until it seemed as small as one of those pole stars, whose light scarcely reaches the earth. Once more the ascent paused.

"See, *mi amigo*, they pause again."

"And for what?" returned Marcos, a little startled at the changed tones of his companion.

"Because I wished it. We are now just half way from the bottom. Do you know what would be the fate of a man who should fall from this distance?"

"His body would be dashed to pieces upon the floor, but he would not know it. He would be dashed to pieces before he reached it. But why do you ask?"

"Oh, from a mere whim of mine, I suppose," laughed the stranger, a wild, half-sneering, half-ferocious laugh, that startled Sayosa, he scarcely knew why.

"But why did you wish to pause here? The damp is not pleasant, and my time is valuable," he asked, a little impatiently.

"I wished to examine the walls, and tell you a little story. But fear not. I will recompense you for lost time when we reach the upper world, if we ever do."

"If we ever do—what do you mean?"

"Why, if the rope should break—such accidents do occur sometimes, do they not?—we would not be in a condition either to pay or receive, would we?" and again that horrible laugh rung out, echoing from side to side of the pit, and died away in a hoarse murmur.

"The blessed Virgin have mercy upon our poor souls if that should happen!" uttered Sayosa. "But you spoke of a story. What is that to me?"

"Listen, and you shall hear. It is short, but the end will be most interesting. There were once two young men, who or what they were you shall soon know. They both loved the same girl, but one of them was favored before the other. Indeed, the unfortunate devil had no acquaintance with her, excepting a chance meeting. She did not even know his name. But he loved her, nevertheless, with all the fervor of his wild, untamed heart. And he would have married her, as he vowed when first they met, but she proudly repulsed him. Ha! you start. Have you heard any thing of the kind?" suddenly asked the stranger, as he bent forward and looked Marcos full in the face.

"Go on!" hoarsely whispered the young miner, as he glared at his companion, his suspicions newly aroused, more at the significant tones than the words he had used.

"Well, they met again, and once more she scorned his suit. And then he swore by all the saints that she should be his, not as a wife, as he first intended, but a plaything—a toy that he could cast aside when he was tired of it. But the two rivals met, and in a duel the poor devil was worsted, by a mere chance. A few days afterward he was frustrated in an attempt to carry off this fair damsel, and by this same rival. And now do you know of whom I am speaking?" he hissed, as he drew a long knife from his bosom, that glimmered in the torchlight.

The young miner did not speak, although he now knew who the stranger was, and the horrible fate that was in store for himself. He felt at his side for the knife he usually wore, but it was gone. As Estevan Despierto—for he it was—noted the action, he laughed triumphantly, and exclaimed:

"It is gone. I slipped it from your belt before we started

up the *tiro*. And see, I will be merciful. You said, a few moments since, that the man falling from here would not feel the blow as he touches the ground. See; I will draw the edge of this knife across the rope, and down you go—down—down—down!" and he stooped still lower, to do as he said, the first cut severing one of the large strands.

But his speech had given Marcos time to collect his strength, and in a situation of such peril one reasons fast. He drew up his body, and felt with his foot for the noose in which he had been sitting. As he gained it, the second cut was given, and with a dull snap the cable parted, the sound mingling with the ferocious laugh of Despierto. But the crouched form of the young miner sprung upward, and his sinewy hands firmly clutched both ankles of his would-be murderer.

It was a movement totally unexpected by the latter, and the sudden shock nearly tore him from his perch. The torch and knife dropped from his hands, as the latter instinctively raised to the cable and gripped it, with the energy of despair. That fact saved them both, but for how long? How would it end?

The vibration given to the cable forced it to and fro, until their forms were nearly dashed against the sharp, jagged points of the rocks, to touch which would be certain death, now that the ascent had recommenced, the shock being evidently regarded by those above as a signal to wind up the rope.

And they were only half way. Despierto strove with all his energy to loosen the hold of his enemy, but in vain. Both feet were fast in the vise-like grip of the young miner, who knew that if one hand, a finger even, should slip, a horrible death was inevitable; that he would shoot down—down through the vast tunnel, and if not suffocated, be killed upon the rocks below, perhaps at the very feet of his comrades.

The murderer shrieked wildly, and implored the young miner to loosen his hold, in his terror. *That the plaited strap of bark, by which alone they were separated from death, was slipping, slowly slipping, down the smooth, hard cable.*

It would bear the weight of one; two, it could not. Marcos fully realized his danger, but what could he do to avoid it? If Despierto would only allow him, he could climb hand

over hand up his body, and cling to the cable above. But he knew, that if he loosened one hand to clutch higher up, that the liberated foot would dash his hand from the other ankle. There was nothing to do but to wait—wait and pray that the outer world might be reached before the slip-noose should drop from the end of the cable.

The young miner fixed his eyes despairingly upon the end of the rope, where it had been severed by Despierto. The gloom was dense, but it stood clear as a rush-light to the preternaturally acute gaze of Sayosa. Slowly, but all too rapidly, it crawled away from him, until, to his strained glare, it seemed like a drop of molten gold, millions of miles above him.

Now it has vanished. The body of the disguised miner conceals it from Marcos, who now feels all the horrors of the death he contemplates. Each moment it seems to him that he hears the sudden *burr-r-r* of the noose slipping over the end. Oh, the horrors of those few minutes, so short in time, and long, countlessly long in experience! This hanging, suspended by a frail cord, between life and death, slowly nearing the one, while yet the other creeps nigher.

Marcos Sayosa closes his eyes with a shudder. He is brave, but such a death. Then Despierto utters a wild, piercing cry, but not of despair; it is one of hope. The mists above them have vanished, and the blue sky is visible. Oh, blessed sight!

Shriek after shriek they send up for help and as they are heard, eager, half-frightened faces are seen peering down toward them. Then the cracking of whips and loud shouts are heard, and the cable glides swiftly up the *tiro*.

But see! not three inches hold the bark-strap. With a hoarse howl, Marcos draws himself up by his arms, and then, with a desperate spring, he releases his hold. To fail is death; to succeed is safety and *life*.

His long, sinewy hands clutched his foe around the neck. He draws up his feet, and places them in Despierto's lap. Then grasping the cable, so massive that he can scarcely span it, he rests his feet upon the shoulders of his companion.

The mouth of the shaft is close at hand, but the bark-rope now fails. It slipped from the cable, and dropped over the body of Estevan Despierto, who had grasped the rope with a death-clutch. A hastily-formed noose is thrown from the side

of the shaft. It misses Sayosa and falls upon the upturned face of the other.

Crazed with terror, he releases one hand to grasp it, thus sealing his own death-warrant. The smooth, hard cable slipped through his benumbed hand. He sees his folly and strives to redeem it; but it is too late. His hand only closes upon the end, that he had severed with a far different intention, and, as his body swiftly descends the ghastly shaft, one wild, piercing shriek is all; it was his last breath.

Nearly unconscious, but still clinging tenaciously to the cable, Marcos Sayosa was rescued from what had seemed certain death, and then, when he was once more upon the earth, that he had mentally bidden good-by, he sunk into a deep swoon, that for a time appeared to be death.

For an hour he remained thus, and the miners had nearly all rushed up from the bowels of the earth, to learn the cause of the catastrophe, and who was the victim. The fall had been heard, but upon inspection, no clue could be gained as to the identity of the ghastly man that strewed the floor. The severed end of the cable was found, and from its clean-cut edges, they knew that foul play had brought on the result. The old miner, who had witnessed the ascent, came, and, as he saw that the rope had been cut *below* the place where the stranger had been secured, he whispered that the victim was their comrade, Marcos Sayosa, the chief of the Scarlet Shoulders. With wild shouts and vows of vengeance, the miners swarmed up the side shafts to avenge their comrade's murder; for he was the idol of their mine.

After a time, the young miner was able to relate the story of his fearful peril and narrow escape; and, from the evidence of the old miner, that the stranger had taken the upper position, his statement was not doubted. But when he told the victim's name, a murmur of surprise and commiseration ran around the crowd, for Estevan Despierto had been a general favorite, although not in so high a degree as Sayosa.

As soon as the young miner recovered his strength, from passing through the terrible ordeal, he resumed his clothes, and mounting a horse that one of his comrades had brought for his use, he slowly rode off toward the *jacale* of *tio Tomás Ventura*.

CHAPTER IX.

THE JAROCHO'S PRISONER.

AN old, gray-haired man, unarmed and upon foot, was slowly and wearily walking along a narrow, faintly-defined pathway that wound, leading up and around a precipitous hill that might almost be called a mountain. He was dressed in a travel-stained suit of frayed and torn clothes, that gave him the appearance of one of the beggars that may be met with in the province described. His tall and once powerful frame was bowed somewhat, and he leaned heavily upon his stout staff. His hands and face were begrimed with dust, and this, added to a stiff, bristling beard of several days' growth, helped to complete the picture.

"Hold, *vagabundo!* what are you doing here?" challenged the voice of a concealed man, and the wayfarer's ears were saluted by a significant *click*, so suggestive of an ounce of lead, as he suddenly paused and exclaimed :

"Do not fire, *señor* stranger; I am a friend."

"Are there more of you?"

"I am alone, and, as you see, unarmed," replied the traveler.

"Good. But who are you, and what do you seek here?" the challenger added, as he stepped from his covert among the bushes, and leaped lightly down into the pathway.

He was the *beau ideal* of a hardy mountaineer, tall, handsome, and of a fine, stalwart form. His dress was that of a *Jarocho* (as all the peasants who reside near the sea-coast and the country around Vera Cruz are termed), and wore in all its purity the peculiar costume of this class of men.

A hat of *Jipajopa* straw, with the broad brim turned up behind; a fine linen shirt, with a band of fine embroidery half hidden between frills of cambric, worn without any vest or coat above it; and a pair of purple cotton-velvet *calzeneros*, open at the knee, and falling in two points to the middle of his calf. A scarf of scarlet China crape was knotted around his waist, in which hung a straight sword, or *cortante*, without sheath or

guard, the sharp and glittering blade of which sparkled in the bright sunshine. On his feet were half-boots of stamped Cardovan leather, heavily spiked with steel. A very valuable, if only for its gold and silver mountings, carabine was dropped into the hollow of his left arm, while the thumb and forefinger of his right hand played with the hammer and trigger, as he curiously scanned the traveler's face and form.

"The *senor* can see that I am a poor, homeless traveler who has been forced to beg his way from Tabasco, on foot, old as I am. And I fear me my long journey has been for naught. I have only one hope left me now, and I seek for Don Serapio Barana, or if he is dead, any of his old band."

"Ha! what may be your business with him, or I should say them?" exclaimed the Jarocho, in apparent surprise.

"Do you know aught of him? The blessed Virgin grant that you may say yes!" cried the traveler, eagerly. "Can you direct me to him?"

"Perhaps. But answer my question first. What is it you wish to know?"

"Listen, then; a few words will tell it. To Don Barana's band of—of *guerilleros* there belonged a man called Tomas Ventura, and whom I have lost track of for nearly twenty years. I wish to know whether he yet lives, or if he is dead, to be shown his grave," hurriedly uttered the traveler.

"And for what—why should you look for him, who may have died years since?"

"Senor, he was my brother!"

"Your brother?" slowly said the Jarocho, then added, after a slight pause: "Well, I will trust you, as I think you are honest. I belonged to the band at that time, and think I remember the man. But there are older men among us, who may be able to tell you about him, for I was but a boy then. However, do not hope for too good tidings, for I fear me he is dead long since."

As he finished, he drew an ivory whistle from his bosom, and blew a shrill, quavering peal that echoed through the hills. In a few moments, two men, attired much as their comrade, appeared upon the hillside, and, after a short explanation, one of them took the place of sentinel, while the other two led the way over a rough path up the hillside, followed by the trav-

eler. Turning a sharp spur in the hill, they passed the foot of an almost perpendicular cliff, whose face was dotted with shrubbery and parasitic plants.

The Jarochos led the way by a series of rude steps, partly the work of nature, partly cut by the hand of man, up the side of the ascent. It was a precarious footing, but their eyes were true, and then, when perhaps three hundred feet from the base, a long line of shrubbery was reached, bordering a ledge of some ten paces in width, that led into a spacious cavern, hollowed out of the rock.

Within this natural fort there gleamed several fires, and further from the entrance burned several rude lamps, either stuck into a crevice or hanging from the roof. Forms of men, women and children were walking around the cavern, or lying by the fires in every attitude of indolent ease, smoking, sleeping, or playing cards. The flickering gleam of the fires but imperfectly lighting up the recesses, playing over the picturesque forms, rendered it a weird, fantastic scene.

A bustle followed the appearance of the stranger, and the form of a monk, as his robe proclaimed him, advanced from a rude couch in one corner, and, after a profound obeisance, the Jarocho introduced the subject of the visit.

"And you wish to see this Don Serapio Barana?"

"If possible, holy father, yes," replied the stranger, in a respectfully low voice.

"You say it is to gain news of your brother; are you sure that you have no other object?" persisted the *padre*, keenly eyeing the traveler.

"No, your reverence, I have no other object; and I pray you, if he is yet alive, to direct me to him."

"It can not be. He is dead!"

"Dead? Alas, then, my poor brother, art thou dead also?" murmured the stranger, in a half-choked voice. "But may I not inquire among these *cavalleros*, father? They may be able to give me some clue; but if not, then, if you will allow me, I will join your band. You smile, but I am worn now by sickness and fatigue. In a week's time I will engage to stand up before your best man, with whatever weapon he may choose, and, my life upon it, I will not be the first to cry hold!" proudly said the traveler, drawing himself up to his

full hight, and glancing half defiantly around the crowd gathered near the entrance of the cavern.

"And you have been—"

"A soldier, father, from my fifteenth year until I started in search of my brother; and if he is no more, I care not what becomes of me. He was the last of my race, and there is no one to care or think of me now. But may I question the men?"

"Yes. But if what you tell me is true about your accomplishments, I trust you will hear nothing against your staying with us. If you lose one brother, you will find five score as true and good," replied the *padre*, speaking in a clear, full voice, and, as the Jarochos cast a quick, significant glance at each other, he saw that he was understood.

"Thanks, holy father," replied the stranger, as he bowed over the hand that was extended him, and noticing the effect of the last words. "If it were not a sin for me to speak so, I would say amen to your wish. But first my brother, then myself," and he was about to turn away, when the priest spoke :

"Stay, my friend; as you are about to join our band—"

"Pardon, father; if I do not find my brother Tomas."

"Of course. But I don't believe you will learn any thing," and he smiled in a significant manner. "It has been so long since, you know."

"True, I can but hope for the best."

"But your name?" added the *padre*.

"Is Garote Ventura."

"Good. When you have questioned the men, come to me, and I will fit you out as a worthy Jarocho should be," added the *padre*.

"If I do not learn of my brother," answered Garote, with a bow.

"True; if," smiled the monk, as he turned away to his couch, while the other pursued his inquiries regarding the lost one with a praiseworthy industry.

He did hear of Tomas Ventura, and if a tithe was true that was told him, then his brother must have been a wonderful man, surely. Every Jarocho appeared to recollect him, told tragic anecdotes in which he was the hero, but all coincided that he was dead; the only point, however, upon which they were agreed.

He was killed by a knife, gun, a fall from his horse, drowned, hung, by falling over the cliff, drank himself to death; and one Jarocho even affirmed that upon one night he saw the devil place the poor fellow astride of his tail, bidding him hold fast around his body, and then fly through the air, riding upon a streak of chain lightning. Oh, yes, he was dead of a surety, and so at length Garote Ventura returned to the *padre*, and announced his intention of becoming one of his band of worthies, which resolve was warmly commended, and the holy father ordered a general carousal in honor of the new recruit.

As a preliminary, the new member was sent with a score of others to Manterial, a little hamlet some few miles distant, with orders to procure all the wine, brandy, and liquor that they could carry, and if the owners demanded pay, to settle the score with a *cortante* or *cuchillo*, by which proceeding he considered the novice would be perfectly initiated into the mysteries of their craft.

Although nothing more serious was shed than some liquor, the expedition was a success, and when they returned the orgies were begun. As there was little fear of a surprise, the sentinels were called in to participate, for no stranger could scale the precipice, unless in broad daylight, without giving the alarm, and the rear entrance was securely closed. All joined in the revelry, even the women and *padre* Gayferos, who proved himself a veteran in the art of wine-bibbing; excelling even among the many experts that were there.

But among them all, there was not one more uproarious, or who filled his cup oftener, than Garote Ventura. As *padre* Gayferos trilled out the last words of a love song, he suddenly started and glanced around the group. Then pointing to a low, squat-built man, he roared out in a voice that was not entirely free from hiccoughs.

"Andrez, thou drunken rascal, come hither!"

"Drunken, by the Virgin! 'Tis pleasure to hear the kettle call the pot black," muttered the fellow, as he arose to his feet, and using his arms as balancing poles, staggered toward the monk.

"Eh! what's that you say?" demanded the monk, a little sharply, as his ear caught the words, although he did not fully comprehend them.

"I only wish the blessed Virgin would remove this killing pain in my back, father," stammered the Jarocho. "See; I can not stand upright, and it twinges so that I nearly fall down from pain."

"Abjure the cup, my son, and it will leave you. Oh, if you could only see yourself now, as I see you, you would feel how disgraceful is drunkenness. Andrez—Andrez, take pattern after me, and you will be a better man," reprovingly quoth the *padre*, shaking his head, and looking as solemn as an owl.

"I will, holy father, I will. If I ever get less sober than you are now, may the devil carry me off, as he did old Ventura," said the fellow, assaying a facetious wink, but which only had the effect of further distorting his naturally ugly visage "But your will, father, your will?"

"Yes, my thoughts wandered. I was reflecting upon the sinfulness of poor human nature," and as he murmured, he poured a pint of wine down the cavity that represented his mouth. "You know where the prisoner is, good Andrez? Yes. Well, my heart is softened at the sight of our innocent pleasures, and I wish you to take him this bottle of wine, to drink our healths in. Poor devil, 'tis a long time since he tasted as good. Do you hear?"

"Yes, your excellency; but don't you think—hadn't I, that is—"

"*Carrai, bobo!* what do you mean?"

"You see if the—the pain in my back, your excellency, should overcome me, I might fall and break the bottle; which would be a pity, you know," stammered Andrez, swaying to and fro.

"Thou speakest well, Andrez, my son. Here, take this; and now go," returned the priest, as he handed the outlaw a huge leatherne bottle.

This was not exactly what Andrez meant, but he knew too well the fierce temper of *padre* Gayferos when once he was aroused, and dared not hesitate longer. But before he had taken a dozen steps he fell to the ground, rolling over and over as he assayed to arise. The new member of the Jarocho band noted this, and he staggered over to the prostrate fellow, and by dint of much pulling and tugging, managed to raise him erect once more; and then he muttered, in a low tone:

"Come, *compadre*, I will go with you. See; lean on me and show me the way to turn. So. We will do it finely," as under Andrez' guidance he turned to the left, after taking down one of the rude lamps, to light their way along the rough, uneven passage.

When once out of sight of the revelers, Andrez whispered:

"*Por Bacchus, 'nor Garote,* the *padre* is cruel in sending us here, away from the wine. Suppose we drink together? The prisoner does not need this wine as much as we. Besides, it is a shame for us gentlemen to wait upon him;" he held up the bottle before him, shaking it and listening to the musical rattle of its contents.

"'Tis true, Andrez. But who is this prisoner?" eagerly asked Ventura.

"Ho, ho! that is a secret, that is known only to the holy father and me. Why, he would burn me alive if I so much as whispered that our old *capitan*, Don Serapo Barana, was his prisoner. No, no, *'nor Ventura*, that is a secret—a secret, do you hear? And although you may be a true man, I won't share it with you," rambled Andrez, with a drunken leer.

"True, I was wrong, as you say," suppressing the exultant smile that shot over his features. "But come, we will go to the cell, and then, after we have drank the wine, will throw the bottle inside, so the *padre* will find it there to-morrow, and then he will not suspect us."

"Good! that is it. Come, your arm. That cursed pain is in my legs now. The rheumatism in my knee joints, you know."

In a few minutes more the men were at the end of the passage, and holding up the lamp, Ventura saw that a massive wooden door, thickly studded with iron nails, and secured by a huge lock and two bolts, had been set into the solid rock. It was a good piece of work, and appeared strong enough to resist any thing short of artillery.

"Here we are at last, and, thank the Virgin, that pain has left me," muttered Andrez, as he dropped to the floor, and began to remove the stopper of the flask. "Come, friend, let us drink and be merry."

"Stop, *'nor Andrez*; how do you open the door?" asked Garote.

"With the key, of course," and he cut short his speech by introducing the mouth of the flask into his own, while the wine gurgled merrily down his throat.

"But where is it? If you have forgotten it, we must find it, or else the *padre* will find us out, after all," added his comrade, a little anxiously.

"Here, see; I carry it in my bosom," said Andrez, as he pulled it forth, attached to a cord that hung around his neck.

"Is it the right one, do you think?" and as he spoke Garote adroitly cut the string, and placing the key in the lock, turned the bolt with some effort.

"Hold, hold, 'nor Garote! I must let no one touch that but myself. Hand it here, or, by the blessed Virgin, I will blow your brains out!" shouted Andrez, as he grasped the pistol at his belt.

"There—see, here it is. And now let us drink. Hold, will you not leave me a drop?" as the now satisfied Jarocho again elevated the flask, and at the same time lowered the liquor.

"Ah, that is delicious!" murmured the drunkard, as he relinquished the bottle and wiped his mouth upon his shirt sleeve. "I wish that the curs—holy Mother, pardon me, I mean blessed *padre* Gayferos would send us upon this mission every night! Don't you *conpairano*?"

"That I do! I would not have missed this chance for a thousand *pesos*," warmly returned the new member, as he handed the bottle to Andrez.

"If he send the wine, yes; if not, no."

This time Ventura did not reprove his comrade for his gluttony, but allowed him to drink as freely and often as he pleased. After a few attempts, ending by missing his mouth, and pouring the remainder of the liquor down the outside of his throat, Andrez dropped the flask, and laying his head upon it for a pillow, closed his eyes. When the loud music that streamed from his nostrils told that he slept the heavy sleep of the drunkard, Ventura picked up the light, and with a steadiness that would have astonished his comrade, had he seen the movement, opened the door and entered the little cell.

Holding the lamp above his head, so as to cast its light

around him, Garote soon perceived the form of a man crouching in one corner of the room, his eyes glaring wildly at the intruder, as if in mortal dread.

"*Santissima Virgin!* can this be he, once so proud and handsome!" murmured Ventura, as he scanned the wretched-looking object before him.

The prisoner started in wonder, partly at the face of a stranger, but more from hearing the voice of kindness and commisseration, when he expected curses and revilings, perhaps blows.

"Who are you?" he faltered, as he shielded his eyes from the glare of the lamp.

"A friend, and if you are he whom I think, a rescuer," returned Ventura.

CHAPTER X.

FELIPE'S CONFESSION.

MARCOS SAYOSA did not escape entirely scatheless from his frightful peril at the *tiro general*, where Estevan Despierto attempted his murder, for the shock had thrown him into a fever that settled upon his brain. But fortunately it was not very severe, and in a week's time he was well again, although somewhat feeble. Still he would not return to his work at the mine. The adventure had sickened him of that, for the time being, at least.

Then he recalled his promise to visit the Canelo *hacienda*, and thinking that a change of air and scene would do him good, he determined to redeem it, and so announced to Tomas Ventura. On the next day the old man told Carlita to get ready to pay an old friend a visit of a few days. She knew better than to cross her father, and although wondering inwardly what new whim he had taken, accompanied him to Donna Paxuita's house, greatly to that venerable dame's surprise. But a few words from Ventura satisfied her.

Marcos was also surprised, but still more so when *tio* Tomas said that he was going to accompany him upon his visit.

"You need not be troubled, Marcos. I shall not intrude upon the fine folk, but stop with the servants. There is one there that I must see, and this may be my only chance; for I do not believe that my days are to be much longer," he exclaimed.

"Pshaw, *tio* Tomas, you will outlive me yet, see if you don't. But are you really in earnest about going with me?"

"So much so that there is but one thing that can prevent me."

"And that?"

"Is death."

"Do you know, *tio*, that I wish you would not speak so much about that? It does not seem right, and gives me the cold chills whenever you mention the word. Perhaps because I have stared it in the face so lately," said Marcos, with a little shrug.

"I may be wrong, but it seems to me that before many days, I, too, shall stand face to face with it; only instead of evading it, as you did, it will be the victor. I only hope that it may not be until after I have seen the person I wish. Then it matters but little, for I know that you will care for Carlita," solemnly uttered Ventura.

"*Carambo, tio*, take a drop of this; it will warm you up and banish all such idle fancies," as he handed the old man a bottle of wine from the cupboard against the wall.

"Not so idle as you think, perhaps; but we will see."

Early the next day the two men rode out from the little timber belt, and set out rapidly upon their journey. They were well mounted and thoroughly armed, as indeed they needed to be, for the country then was not the most peaceful or safe to traverse. They determined to divide the journey into three days' ride, as neither of them was very strong.

Nothing occurred till the third day of any consequence. They had halted at about eleven o'clock, to lie by during the heat of the day, under a few small trees that grew beside a spring, bubbling forth from beneath a pile of sandstone. They kindled a fire to boil their chocolate, and, not fearing any danger; were not particular as to whether they burned perfectly dry or damp wood. In consequence, the smoke, thick and dark, arose

in a considerable column above the tree tops before the fire was fairly started.

It caught the eye of a single horseman, who was riding along upon the opposite side of the rocks, and, after eyeing it curiously for a few moments, he slowly advanced in its direction. Then securing his horse in a small ravine, he unslung his *escopette*, and proceeded to investigate the cause.

But of this our two friends were, of course, unaware. They little suspected that the hunter of blood was so near. Had a *zapilote*, that dusky scavenger of Mexico, been sailing overhead, he would have seen this picture:

The green clump of trees, shadowing the little rill of water that ran from the sparkling, bubbling spring; the fire lighted and now bursting into a bright, roaring blaze, with the forms of two men bending over it, while their horses eagerly cropped the rich grass that grew hard by. On the opposite side of the gray rocks he would have seen the dark form of a man rapidly gliding along with trailed rifle, crouching half way to the ground, until he had to bend his long arms to keep them from dragging. This he would have seen, and more. Two horsemen swiftly approaching the spring upon nearly the same trail as that followed by Marcos Sayosa and Tomas Ventura, and consequently closed out from the view of the solitary stalker.

His instincts would have told him that there was a fair prospect of his dinner being afforded him, and he would have hovered over the spot.

The two men were sitting near the fire, engaged in conversation, when one of the horses stamped his hoof and pricked up his ears, as though he scented something suspicious. This did not escape the watchful eye of Ventura, and, as he followed the direction indicated by the tremulous ears of his horse, he saw a shaggy head rise from behind a boulder, and then the bright barrel of a gun as it was leveled toward them.

"Look out, Marcos, there's some deviltry going on!" he shouted out, leaping forward and pulling the young miner backward to the ground.

Just then the gun cracked, and, with a wild yell of agony, the old man fell to the ground, writhing and moaning with

pain. The bullet that had been intended for Marcos had passed through his own body. The youth saw the jet of flame-colored smoke, and regaining his feet, he drew a pistol and bounded forward to avenge the death of his companion.

The murderer, nothing loth, leaped from behind his covert, and with one report the two pistols were discharged. Marcos was untouched, and Sylva Cohecho received but a crease upon his shoulder, that acted as a spur. Before either could draw another weapon, they came into collision, and grappled with each other in a death struggle.

Although Sayosa was a powerful man, and had never before met his superior, his late illness had weakened him considerably, and he found, when too late, he was overmatched. The long arms of his antagonist seemed like bars of flexible steel, and wound around him, clasping him close to Cohecho's body, with such force that it seemed as if his ribs were being crushed.

Still, he struggled manfully, and, by being so much taller than his foe and very active, he managed to keep his feet. But he was weakening, and his head began to swim. Cohecho saw his advantage, and did not fail to improve it. Under his enormous strength the tall, stalwart miner bent and swayed, until, with a dexterous trip, the murderer threw his antagonist, falling heavily upon him.

"Ah-ha! my game cock, your spurs are clipped now!" he growled, as he kneeled upon the senseless body, and, drawing his knife from his bootleg, tore open the shirt upon the young miner's bosom, so as to gain a fair blow.

When Tomas Ventura fell, he thought that he was mortally wounded, but when he heard the struggle going on between his adopted son and Cohecho, he raised himself up on one hand, fearing lest Marcos, too, should be worsted. He saw enough to know that, unassisted, this would be the result and, dragging himself along by his hands, he managed to reach the guns, although the path was marked with his blood, and every motion wrung a groan from his lips.

He reached and cocked one of them, supporting it by resting his elbow upon the ground. Still he dared not fire, for the chances were as much in favor of his hitting Marcos as Cohecho. But then the combatants fell, and, as Sylva raised his knife to give the finishing blow, the *escopette* cracked and,

true to its aim, an ounce ball crashed through the huge, shaggy head of the hunchbacked monster.

When the smoke shut off his view, Ventura swooned away, and for a long time all was blank. When he once more awoke to consciousness, he saw that Marcos was bending over him, and there were strangers in the glade. Then one of them approached and stood where the sunbeams fully revealed his features. Tomas Ventura glared at him wildly for a moment, and then shrieked :

"Holy Virgin, it is he!"

"And what is puzzling your brain now, Luisa, darling? You have been silent for one whole ten minutes by the watch. Surely something dreadful must be pending."

"Why—was I still? I must have been thinking, Felipe."

"Really? Well, as I never heard of your doing such a thing before, suppose you tell me the subject of your thoughts. Come, call me your father confessor, and begin."

The speakers were Luisa and Felipe Canelo, who were walking in the large garden at the rear of the house, that was surrounded by a moderately high wall. They both looked somewhat abstracted, and Felipe particularly so, as though ill at ease.

"Well, I know of none that would suit me better than my handsome, noble brother," she replied, with forced gaiety. "Come, here in the arbor. Let us sit down and I will try to explain why I am 'out of sorts,' if you will be as frank."

"I?" echoed Felipe, as if astonished at her words.

"Yes, sir, you. Do you think you can blind me? I say that you have some secret in your mind, and I must know what it is; so there!"

"Sis—Luisa, tell me what you mean. What is it that you know?" cried Felipe, hoarsely, as he sunk upon the seat at her side.

"Brother, Felipe, are you ill? You are as pale as a ghost!"

"No, no; I am well, quite well. But tell me what you know—what you meant by my secret," tightly clasping her hands.

"A secret—did I say that? No, Felipe, I was only jest-

ing. Surely, you have no secret from me, your sister, who loves you so dearly?" asked Luisa, gazing up into his half-averted face.

"Are you sure that you do not know—that you tell me the whole truth?" faltered her brother.

"Felipe!"

"Pardon, sister. I believe I am mad of late—" he began.

"Yes, ever since that strange man visited you. Dearest brother, can not you confide your troubles to your mother and sister? Who should you trust if not those who are so proud of, and love you so tenderly?" pleaded Luisa, pressing his hand.

"And so I will; but first, dear one, tell me of what you were thinking a while since," returned Felipe, as he banished the cloud from his face, and turned toward his sister.

"You will not laugh at me, brother? Well, it was of that noble stranger, who so gallantly rescued us from those ruffians."

"And what did you think of him—in what way, I mean?"

"I can scarcely tell. When he first spoke to me, it seemed as though I had often heard his voice before, and when he was silent, the words were repeated over and over in my heart. And then something seemed to tell me that he was connected with my future life, and that he would have great influence over it. But whether for joy or sorrow, I could not tell. I knew that I should meet him again, and that we would become very dear to each other, and it was that secret voice that made me join my request to yours that he would visit us. I have often thought of this since, and tried to explain it to myself, but can not. We have not seen or heard of him since, and yet I know that he will come, that he will be here soon, and that my feeling will be explained. But how, or in what manner, I can not tell. I only know that it will be so!" murmured Luisa, in a dreamy, half-musing tone.

"And shall *I* explain this miracle, Luisa?" asked Felipe, bitterly, as he dropped her hand, and drew a little back.

"If you can, oh, if you can, dear brother!" exclaimed the maiden.

"I have solved many an enigma far more difficult than this

one of yours, child. You say that you know this young miner will come here?"

"He will; I feel it."

"And what would you say, my sister, if he should come to you and ask you to be his bride—to mate with *him*, the digger in the earth?"

"Felipe, what do you mean? You frighten me!"

"This. I mean that this Marcos Bayosa loves you. And more; that you love *him*!" exclaimed Canelo, bitterly.

"Oh, brother, surely you are wrong. He does not love me, nor do I love him—in the way you mean. And yet he is very dear to me; I know it, and perhaps I *do* love him. I don't know; it is so strange—so sudden; you have frightened me!" cried Luisa, burying her face in her hands, and sobbing convulsively.

"Pardon me, sister—dear Luisa; I was mad—cruel, to speak so fiercely," exclaimed Felipe, gently raising her head, and wiping the tears tenderly away. "See, let this be my apology," softly pressing a kiss upon her brow.

"Thank you, Felipe; I was very foolish," smiled Luisa, through her tears, "but I could not bear that you should speak harshly to me. I may love this stranger; perhaps I do, as you say so; but rest assured that I love you far better—a thousand times better than him!"

"If I could believe that you would say this after you have heard my confession, then I would be happy—oh, so happy!"

"I will, Felipe. Surely, you can say nothing to change it."

"Ah, you do not know. You will hate me, scorn me, if I tell you my secret!" he murmured, despondingly.

"Felipe, can not you trust me?" asked Luisa, reproachfully.

"Yes, yes; I will—I *must*. It burns my heart and racks my brain until it seems as though I would go mad! But our poor mother; how will she bear it? Holy Virgin! at times I am tempted to kill myself."

"Don't, brother—dear Felipe; you frighten me when you look that way," murmured Luisa, shrinking back a little.

"Frighten you, my angel? Not for worlds!" and he bent forward to bestow a kiss, when he suddenly started back.

"No, no, not now. If ever my lips touch yours, the offer must first come from you, not me. It were a sin now!"

"Felipe!"

"Wait. Do not speak or look at me. If you should, my courage will fail me. Wait until I have finished my confession, and then—you shall judge me. Luisa, if you loved a man with such love as you should feel for a husband, and he should be guilty of a sin, a great crime, what would you do? Would you hate and despise him, and tell him to begone where you might never look upon his face again?"

"Not if he repented, Felipe, and acknowledged his sin of his own free will. No. If I loved a man as you say, brother—if I loved him as I do *you*, his fate should be mine. Where he dwelt, there would be my home; in all things we would be but one. If the world neglected or scorned him, I would try and make him forget all—all except that to me he was dearest of all. Do you understand me? I can not say what I would, but you can guess what I mean," exclaimed Luisa, as she drew nearer to Felipe.

"No, Luisa, not yet; wait until I have told all, and then if you forgive me, put your hand in mine. But think well. If you do, it will be mine—mine forever! But now, listen.

"Luisa, *I am not your brother, but am an impostor!* Stay. Do not speak yet; let me finish, now that I have said the worst. But as the blessed Virgin knows, I thought that I was who I first came. In that, at least, I am innocent."

"The story that I told you and moth—*your mother*, was all true, so far as concerned myself. I was raised among your uncle's band of Jarochos, and taught to consider myself an orphan. Who or what my parents were, I could never learn. They either did not know, or would not tell me. As I grew older, I learned how wicked were the ways of my comrades, but I could not resolve to leave the only friends that I had ever known, and still continued with the band. But I did not join them upon their plundering excursions, and managed to live fairly by selling the game I killed, or its hides. Then, as I told you, when I returned from one of my excursions, I found our captain, or your uncle, lying wounded unto death; and then he told me who I was, giving me the letter to carry to your mother and whom he swore we also

my parent. God help me, I did not dream that a dying man would so perjure himself, and I believed all that he told me!

" You know how I was received, and that your mother was struck by my resemblance to your dead father, even before the letter was opened. But I can not dwell upon that now—now that I have lost it all. Then came the note that so astounded me, when I left you here, to meet the writer, who was none other than the lieutenant of the band to which I had belonged. I met him, and then, for the first time, I learned the plot of which I had been made the instrument.

" He told me that I was not your brother ; that he was dead, and showed me a letter from your uncle saying as much. He then offered me my choice. Either to pay two thousand *oneas* each year, and he would be silent, otherwise he would expose the imposition to Senora Canelo. What could I do ? That which was right, you say ; but I could not. Holy Mother, forgive me, I promised the villain that I would submit to his demands, and in that was my sin, or part of it.

" The other was in receiving the caresses of you two—ladies, that belonged to a relation—not to me, the impostor. But my punishment was begun, even then. How could I look you in the face, and know, that if you only realized what a wretch I was, in reality, that you would as soon place to your lips a plate of red-hot iron, as to have kissed me. Can you guess how the words, "*mother—sister*," choked me as I was forced to utter them. But that was not all.

" When I found that you were not my sister, the love that I had thought a brother's grew stronger and more painful, until I found that I loved you as only a man can love once in his lifetime. God knows how I strove to subdue it, and crush it out from my heart ; but could I ? Ah, no ; it grew from day to day, hour to hour, until it became my master. It showed me the crime that I had contemplated, and at last I resolved to confess it, and then fly from the spot where I had been so happy, but I must again make miserable ! " concluded the young man, as he covered his face with his hands, and wept the bitter tears of one whose soul is rocked with agony.

For a few moments Luisa set as if petrified, so sudden

and unexpected had been the shock. But then the wild look passed from her eyes, and as they dimmed, her hand stole slowly along and rested upon that of him whom she had believed her brother. As he felt the light touch he shrunk away, as if it had been a serpent, and exclaimed:

"Stay, Luisa; do not touch me!"

"Felipe, do you remember what you said a while since? *Here is my hand*," whispered the maiden, as she again touched his hand with hers.

"Luisa, think what you do. If I take your hand, remember that it is for ever; as that of my wife!" cried Felipe.

"Still I say, take it, Felipe—must I say it? *I love you!*"

CHAPTER XI.

IN THE CAVE AND OUT OF IT.

As the Jarocho's prisoner heard these words spoken by Garote Ventura, he approached, but with the hesitating step of one who doubts, while yet he hopes. The glow of the lamplight shone full upon him, and Ventura's eyes quickly and keenly scrutinized his form and every feature.

In stature he was tall, unusually so, and although now greatly emaciated, had once been a robust and powerful man. The muscles of his arms and chest still stood out like bands of steel, showing plainly through the tatters that served him for clothes. Although his hair was thickly threaded with silver lines, his form was not yet bowed, nor the fire quenched in his large, keen black eyes.

The remnants of his former beauty could still be discerned—he proud, well-cut profile and noble features, although marred somewhat by grims and wrinkles, were yet plain enough for any one who had known him in better days, to be enabled to recognize him now.

"A friend, and if you are he whom I think, a rescuer," Garote Ventura had said.

"The Virgin grant that I may be! But it can not be. A friend to me, and here? No, no, I was foolish to think so," bitterly exclaimed the prisoner.

"Perhaps not," added Ventura. "I think you are the one I seek, and if so, in an hour's time you may be far from here, if you wish it."

"If I wish it!" echoed the captive.

"Yes. But tell me who you are. Stop. If you are he whom I mean, you have committed fearful crimes. But you have reparation in your power; and if you perform it faithfully, I think I may promise that you can live in peace, to go whither you will," he added, impressively.

"You ask my name. If it were stained with a tenfold blackness, I would speak it, in the chance of escaping from here. And yet it was a noble one once, until I defiled it! I am, or *was*, Agustin Canelo," answered the prisoner.

"I thought so. But, holy Mother of Mercy, what a change!" murmured Garote, as he gazed at the man. "It is good. You are the man that I seek, and I will keep my word, although you murdered my master."

"Your master? Who are you?"

"Look. You should know me. I have not changed so much. Think; can you not remember the time that I used to carry you upon my back, playing horse?"

"Tadeo Campos?"

"Yes, I am Tadeo Campos. But we have no time to lose. Remove your rags, while I haul in this drunken scoundrel."

In a few moments Andrez was pulled inside the cell, and his clothes donned by the prisoner, although not without some difficulty, for they were several sizes too small. Tadeo Campos, as we must now call him, relocked the door from the inside, and coolly seated himself upon the body of Andrez, much to the surprise of Canelo.

"Why do you stop here, Campos? Every moment seems an age until I am free from this cursed hole once more," impatiently exclaimed the latter, fingering nervously the weapons that he had taken from the drunken Jarocho.

"For two reasons. One is, that it is best to give the gentlemen outside a little more time to swill their wine, for, unless their wits are somewhat foggy, you would never pass for our dumpy friend Andrez, here. And the other, is to do justice to your brother's family—to prove who their son is. Will you promise to do this?"

"I will; any thing so that I can get away from this hole and the tortures of that cursed *padre* Gayferos. But, supposing the *boy* is dead?" added Canelo, anxiously.

"It may be. But the one you sent is an impostor, at any rate. But we will settle that afterward. Will you do all that lays in your power to do?"

"I will!" emphatically replied the other.

"Well, it may be so, but I am a cautious man by nature, and experience has doubled it. If you will swear to tell the entire truth, to answer fully and explicitly all questions that may be asked you—if you swear this, I say, and kiss the holy cross, I will set you free. If—"

"If not?"

"Then I will raise the alarm, and you may do the best you can."

"Enough, I will swear it," hastily said Canelo.

The crucifix was produced, and the required oath taken, when Tadeo said:

"Now you remain here while I go and reconnoiter. If all is right we will be free in half an hour. But blow out the light, as it might be seen as I open the door."

"You will come back?" faltered Canelo.

"If I meant to betray you or do you harm, would I have taken all this trouble?" returned Campos, impatiently.

"Pardon, good friend; I am sadly changed from what I once was."

The *capataz*, after extinguishing the light, softly opened the door and stepped forth. Then he saw the wisdom of having put out the light, for, just turning the nearest angle, he saw a man bearing a light, and then recognized it to be none other than *padre* Gayferos. He only paused long enough to note that the worthy priest had imbibed such a quantity of the confiscated wine, that he was laying off a somewhat irregular pattern for a "Virginny rail fence," and muttering incoherently to himself. Then he slipped inside the cell, and after silently locking the door, told his companion of the approaching visitor.

Canelo shuddered and shrunk back as if in fear, so great had been the tortures that he had endured at the monk's hands, when unable to resist. But as his hand touched the

knife at his waist, this vanished—the sudden change boding ill for the enemy, should he fall into the ex-prisoner's hands.

They both stood close to the door, and soon heard the tipsy priest fumbling at the lock for some time before he could fit his key into place, cursing fearfully at every breath. But at last the bolt yielded, and he kicked the door wide open. Canelo sprung forward with a howl like a wild beast, and clutched the monk by the throat, while Tadeo grasped the lamp.

The two foes fell to the ground, and by some means the light was dashed from Tadeo's hand, and shattered to pieces upon the rocky floor. He turned to light the other, for he could do nothing in the dark, and knew that their safety depended upon the monk's capture without an alarm being raised. A few moments sufficed for this, but when he turned the light upon the two men, a horrible, sickening sight met his gaze.

The half-crazed Canelo was kneeling upon the breast of *padre* Gayferos, brandishing a gory knife in one hand, while the other clutched his victim's throat. He had slit the unfortunate man's mouth from ear to ear, and actually torn out his tongue by the roots, and then thrust it down his throat!

Acting on the impulse, Tadeo leaped forward and knocked Canelo from his victim's body, and then buried his long knife to the hilt in the priest's breast, at once putting an end to his tortures. As he turned, it was just in time to avoid the rush of Canelo, and elude the vicious plunge of a *cuchillo*, that slit open the clothes upon his side. Then, before the mad man could turn, he was upon his back, driving him head first to the floor; when, placing a knife at his throat, Campos missed:

"*Mil diablos*, ingrate! Is that my reward for risking my life to save yours? By the Virgin of Atocha, I have a mind to serve you the same trick that you did the *padre*, cursed dog!"

"I was mad, good Campos, and knew not what I did. And if you only knew the tortures that man has subjected me to, you would praise not blame me. But let me up now. It has passed and I am myself again."

"I will. But look you. If you make a motion toward

me, I will plaster the wall with your brains, as I'm a living man. Do you hear?"

" You may. Take my weapons if you will, but let me up. We must be going. They may discover us, and then—"

" And then; yes, I know," said Campos, as he arose, keeping a watchful eye upon his companion. " Come, drag this carrion into the cell, and then we will be going. It is time now, if ever."

This was quickly done, and as the monk was fully as large as Canelo, he exchanged clothes once more, knowing that he would run less risk of detection in that garb than the other, for no one of the Jarochos would venture to address him unless spoken to first, so great were their fears of the *padre*.

" I will lead the way," said Canelo, " and you follow close. I know every inch of the passage, even in the dark."

The lamp was extinguished, and, after locking the cell door and retaining the key, the two adventurers stole cautiously along the passage. The sounds of the outlaws carousing grew rapidly plainer, and from the number of voices combined it was plain that Tadeo had either overrated the strength of the wine, or underestimated the strength of the reveler's brains. Still they did not despair, but resolved to run the risk at once, and trust to their good fortune and the priestly disguise to carry them through, rather than delay longer.

" Will you risk it?" asked Campos.

" We must. I can imitate the *padre's* air and motion."

" Remember that he was slightly tipsy, and if you shroud your face and long hair in the cowl, I think there will be no particular danger," whispered Tadeo, as they paused at the angle from whence the first glimpse could be caught of the orgies.

Fully one half of the Jarochos were overcome totally by their potations, and lay scattered about, regardless whether they rolled upon the table or beside it, as it was all the same height. In some cases they were used for seats, in others as pillows, and the crowd amply made up in loudness what it had lost by the decrease in numbers. Men, women, and children were mixed in one grand, ever-shifting panorama, but indistinctly revealed by the faint, flickering light.

Making the best of a bad bargain, the two adventurers en-

tered the grand apartment, and reeling in a zigzag course, proceeded toward the top of the "staircase." But they were destined not to escape without interruption. Tadeo Campos was recognized (as Garote Ventura), and recollecting that it was in honor of his having joined the band that they were carousing, began to call him to come and drink with them, several of the more sober men rising and staggering toward the two adventurers.

Then it was that the monk's garb stood them in good stead. Fearing lest he should be recognized if they approached too closely, Canelo turned, with his face and head still shrouded in the cowl, and with a very fair imitation of the *padre's* voice, said :

" Go back to your wine. Our brother Ventura hath something to confide to me, that may prove of great benefit to the band. *Cuerpo di Cristo!* ye dogs, do you hear me? The one who comes a step nearer will drink no more, for his head will be all mouth! Back with you, you sacrilegious thieves!"

The Jarochos paused, and then returned to their liquor, for the steely glitter of the monk's pistol awed the boldest of them. But there was considerable muttering among them, and one especially, whose comments were overheard by our friends.

" By Venus, the *padre* is in grum humor all of a sudden. I guess 'na Jesusita was not in the mood to be confessed to-night."

A wild, boisterous peal of laughter followed this pointed remark, and Canelo deemed it best not to notice it, although he well knew what would have been the *bona fide padre's* answer.

They had now nearly reached the edge of the platform and were congratulating themselves inwardly upon their happy escape, when a man arose from the face of the cliff, and meeting them, at once dropped upon his knees before the disguised men, murmuring :

" Your benediction, holy father!"

This rencontre was so sudden and unexpected that Canelo started back with an exclamation of dismay, and at the same moment the cowl dropped back from his face. The man

looked up, and, as the moonlight shone full upon the ex-chief's features, he uttered a gasp of terror:

"*Santissima Virgin!* the captain's ghost!"

Fortunately Tadeo Campos did not lose his presence of mind, and as the intruder arose he leaped forward, and shot out his clenched fist, the blow alighting full upon the unprotected throat of the Jarocho, its terrible force effectually checking any further outcry, and at the same time hurled him headlong down the precipice. There was a dull, horrible thud, and then all was still.

Glancing around at the Jarochos, half expecting to see the band come rushing in a body to avenge their comrade's death, the two men grasped their weapons, determined to sell their lives dearly, if such must be. But to their great joy they saw that the outlaws were unconscious of the tragedy just enacted, and then hastily began their perilous descent.

By keeping close to Canelo, and stepping in his footprints, Campos effected it in safety, and in a few minutes they were both standing in the firm path at the foot of the precipice. Then Canelo muttered, in a cautious voice:

"And now the next thing is to procure horses, for we can not go upon foot, as we may be followed at any moment."

"I have a horse four miles from here, where I left him at a *jacale* as I came," returned Tadeo.

"We can do better than that. The stable of the band is not far from here, and in it are the best horses for leagues around, or was, when I was chief. I do not think that there can be any guard left there, as it would be almost impossible for a stranger to find it, even in the daytime. Besides, you said that *padre* Gayferos bade *all* the men join in the carousal?"

"He did; and when it began all were present who were at home, or at least so I was told in answer to my questions. But that man whom we threw over the cliff? Who was he?"

"Not one of the regular members, but a sort of spy who lives at the foot of the mountain. He came with news, I presume."

"Well, then, if you think best, let us hasten to the stable, for the further we are away from this den by daybreak, the safer I will feel about my neck. For my part, I have seen

seen quite enough for one night, although they do not stint one in wine, and it was first-class, too," said Tadeo, as he closely followed his companion, who now turned up a narrow defile, the bottom of which was thickly strewn with coarse gravel.

"And a little of that same wine would not be amiss now. But silence; we are nearly there," cautioned Canelo.

After making several abrupt turns, the two men paused in front of a dense thicket, and Canelo uttered a low, peculiar whistle, then repeated it twice, at short intervals. There was no answer, and again he sounded the signal, but with the same result.

"It is as I thought. There is no one here. Come; in five minutes we will be clear of the mountain," cried Canelo, joyously, and closely followed by Tadeo Campos, pushed through the yielding screen of bushes, and after a few steps they entered a spacious chamber, excavated from the earth.

Numerous large, lustrous eyes, in pairs, were turned toward them, and when Canelo lighted the lamp that he had brought with him from the cell, the glow showed them the sleek forms of a large number of horses, standing in rude stalls, with their accoutrements ranged along the other side of the "stable." A few moments sufficed to saddle and bridle the two animals they had selected, and then once more extinguishing the light, they led their steeds out along the way they had entered, and in a few minutes were clear of the hill and speeding along the valley.

After riding some miles in silence, they drew in their horses to a walk to breath them, and Canelo broke the silence by saying:

"But you have not told me yet how it was you learned I was a prisoner, and where they had confined me. How was it?"

"Well, in the first place, I overheard a conversation between master Felipe, or rather he who passes as such, and a precious scoundrel who called himself Don Lopez Romulo—"

"Barajo; he goes by both names."

"Yes. And I then learned that the young man was an impostor, and that you were yet alive. He did not then hint that you were a prisoner; that I learned afterward. Well, this

Romulo or Barajo gave Don Felipe an address at Guanajuato, where he was to call and pay him a lot of money to keep the secret he had got hold of. I heard the address and resolved to be at the meeting.

"When the night came, I was hanging round the *venta*, which was in a low part of the city just at the outside edge. I waited until Don Romulo came out, jingling his pocketfull of golden ounces, and after following him until he came to a dark alley, I gave him a few inches of cold steel, and dragged him into the alley, out of the way, and where I would not be interrupted by any person passing by.

"I had not intended to kill him at once, but only disable him, and then frighten him into telling where I could find you, and any thing else that might be of service. He was badly hurt, and it was not hard to frighten him into doing as I wished, for the beggar vowed that he was not fit to die, and I did not spare my threats.

"Somehow he mistook me for one Ventura—Tomas Ventura—who had once belonged to his band, and told me all that I wanted to know. That you were kept a prisoner by him and a priest, who had forced you to write the letter given to Felipe, and make him believe that you was dying; and the place where I would find the band.

"I saw that the poor devil would not live until morning, and as he would have no use for the gold at the place he was booked for, I transferred it to my own pocket, and left him where he lay. Then I resolved to act upon what I had learned, and try to rescue you, that the whole truth of the matter might be arrived at.

"So I passed myself off as Garote Ventura, seeking for my dear brother Tomas, and as you know, gained my object after some little trouble. And now, is this boy, the *real* Felipe Canelo, alive, or not?"

"I believe that he is dead," slowly answered Canelo. "Yes, he must be. He said he killed him."

"Now look you, Senor Don Augustin Canelo," hotly replied Campos. "I am a quick-tempered man, as you know well, and when I make up my mind to a thing, I generally do it. Now you may be perfectly honest in what you say, but I don't believe that you are. I have not told you all I heard from

this Lopez Romulo, and it is a clue that I can follow up, if you do not satisfy me. It may be hard and require time, but it can be done, if needs be. And if you play me false, by the Virgin of Atocha, you will find the hand that set your body free will not hesitate long about doing your soul the same service. Do you understand me?"

"I do. But there is no need of such heat. I told you I was changed, and moreover, I have sworn upon the holy cross to reveal the truth. What I may have to say I will keep until it can be told to Senora Canelo herself," proudly answered Don Augustin.

"Good! now I know you again. I will trust you," exclaimed Tadeo Campos, as he set his horse once more into a gallop.

CHAPTER XII.

EXPLANATIONS.

"THANK the Virgin, we are nearly at the spring where we can get a good drink of cold water. I am nearly famished with thirst!" exclaimed Tadeo Campos.

"Yes, this cursed road, added to the sun's heat, is intolerable. See, the horses know it as well as we do, although I doubt whether either of them were ever within fifty leagues of the place," returned Augustin Canelo, as their jaded beasts increased their pace of their own accord, with loud whickers of delight.

In the course of a few minutes the little grove was sighted, and as the horses broke into a gallop, Tadeo, who was looking intently toward their intended resting-place, uttered an exclamation of vexation, and pulled up his horse, almost throwing him upon his haunches.

"Maldito! see, a fire!"

"Sure enough, some one is before us. But there can be no danger. Let's advance. We must have water, and will, if I have to fight for it!" impatiently exclaimed Canelo, clapping spurs to his horse's side, and charging ahead, closely followed by Tadeo.

Then they heard a report, succeeded in a few moments by another, and again they halted. By this time they were close enough to the spring to note the struggle going on between two men, and then, as they fell to the ground, another puff of smoke came, followed by a report, and the uppermost combatant fell backward with a wild yell.

After waiting for a few minutes, and seeing nothing to occasion further alarm, the two travelers approached the spring, with arms in readiness, and sheltered behind their horses' bodies.

There was no need of this caution, however, as they soon found, and as but one of the three men showed any signs of life, they at once set about restoring him. The first words that Marcos Sayosa spoke when he once more opened his eyes, were of Tomas Ventura; then noting the old man lying apparently dead, the young miner rushed to his side, not heeding the astonishment that was pictured upon the face of the two travelers.

On examination, they found that although very badly wounded, Ventura was still alive, and set about restoring him. For a long time all efforts were futile, but then the old man opened his eyes, and when they rested upon Augustin Canelo, he exclaimed:

"Holy Virgin, it is he!"

"And are you indeed Tomas Ventura?" eagerly asked Canelo.

"Yes, yes, but I shan't tell you; you would kill him! Yes, you would kill the boy, so you could get his wealth. Ah-ha, I know you—I know you well. You wanted me to murder the babe, but I fooled you; ha! ha! ha! yes, I deceived you!" screamed Tomas Ventura, wildly.

"Then he lives—you did not kill him? The child, I mean?"

"Yes, yes, I did—I did kill him! Marcos, Marcos, come here, or he will murder you because you stand between him and wealth. Come, let us go to Senora Canelo, your mother, Marcos; she will protect you!"

"Peace, *tío*, no one will harm you now. These gentlemen are friends. They saved our lives, don't you remember?" said the youth, soothingly.

"No, I tell you, no! He is your deadly enemy, that man

is. He is your uncle, and hired me to kill you, but I deceived him, and now you will be rich—rich, and so will Carlita!"

"This is not altogether raving, senor," said Canelo, to Marcos, as the latter glanced at him. "But we can not explain now. When we get to the *hacienda*, I will do so. Do you think he could be borne in a litter?"

"Yes, yes, I *must* bear it! I must see the Senora Canelo before I die, to tell her all I know," cried Ventura, eagerly.

"Don Augustin, what does this mean?" asked Tadeo Campos.

"You hear. It is true what he says. I did hire him to dispatch Felipe Canelo, and if he speaks true, then this man must be the real heir."

"The features are the same as his father's. Holy Mother, if it should be true!" murmured Campos, placing a hand upon the shoulder of the astonished youth, and keenly scrutinizing every feature.

"Felipe Canelo—what do you mean? Who am I?" he faltered.

"We shall soon see. But come. We must fix a litter between two horses, and convey Ventura to the *hacienda*. There is no time to lose," returned Canelo.

The litter was soon formed, and the wounded man placed in it. Before they started, the body of Sylva Cohecho was examined, but nothing of any importance discovered. Canelo recognized him as one of the Jarochos who had belonged to his band. He was left where he had fallen, to feed the *zopilate* or *coyote*, a fitting end for the brutal traitor and murderer.

As they rounded the pile of granite, the concealed horse that had belonged to Cohecho was discovered by his whicker ing, and then the party were again remounted, and able to travel at a tolerable rate without inconvenience. It was some time after dark when they reached the *hacienda*, and while the wounded man was being cared for, Tadeo Campos proceeded to break the news to Senora Canelo.

He found the three sitting together, and, as Felipe had confessed his fault to the elder lady also, his task was far less difficult than he had anticipated. This he learned before he told his story, and, thus set right, he narrated what he had overheard, and the resolution he had come to, of searching

out the uncle, Augustin Canelo, and how he had accomplished it; not, however, without many interruptions from his hearers. He dared not tell all at once, but hinted that it was barely possible the missing son might be found yet. Indeed, that he was almost certain of his being yet alive and well.

In the meantime, Augustin Canelo had been closely questioning Tomas Ventura, who was now perfectly sensible, and was finally convinced that the youth we have known as Marcos Sayosa was none other than the long-mourned-for Felipe Canelo.

The astonishment of the latter, who heard it all, may be better imagined than described, when he found that he was the brother of the beautiful Luisa who had so deeply interested him, and that the handsome, stately lady was his mother.

On the next day the entire party collected, and all matters were fully cleared up, although it was a painful meeting between the injured mother and the murderer of her husband. No further doubt remained as to the identity of Marcos, or Felipe, as we must now call him, and he was warmly, almost wildly, welcomed by his mother and sister.

And the one who had believed himself the stolen son was not the least happy among them, although his birth and parentage were once more shrouded in mystery. All Canelo could tell him was that he had been taken by a detachment under Lopez Romulo, or Barajo, in an attack in which all but he had been slain by the Jarochos. For what he was spared, could not now be told.

Canelo had been threatened with death with the demands of the priest and Romulo, and it was then that the letter was written, and the youth deceived as to his parentage. After his departure, Canelo had been confined in the cell with the knowledge of only Andrez beside the two confederates; it being given out that he had died, and was buried, at his own request, by the priest and Romulo.

The youth once more took his name of Barana, but, to prevent confusion, changed Felipe into Florencio, and some two months after the discovery of the real heir, there was a double wedding, in which Felipe and Carlita, Florencio and Luisa, played the leading parts, and it is on record that neither of the quartette ever had cause to regret the act.

Tomas Ventura recovered from his wound, and lived to play with the children of *his* children, as he called Felipe and Carlita, dying at a "green old age," outliving Tadeo Campos, who, however, taught Felipe junior how to ride and swim.

Augustin Canelo entered a monastery, but did not live long after renouncing the world, his constitution being undermined by the tortures he had endured at the hands of the fiendish *padre* Gayferos.

Felipe made good use of his mining experience by discovering a rich silver lode upon his own land, and was very successful in working it.

Lucas Planillas was not forgotten by Felipe, who made him his head *mandorle* upon his silver mine, and the majority of his comrades who had borne the "Scarlet Shoulder" knots were employed by him as workmen.

"And so we leave them, in peace and happiness."

THE END.

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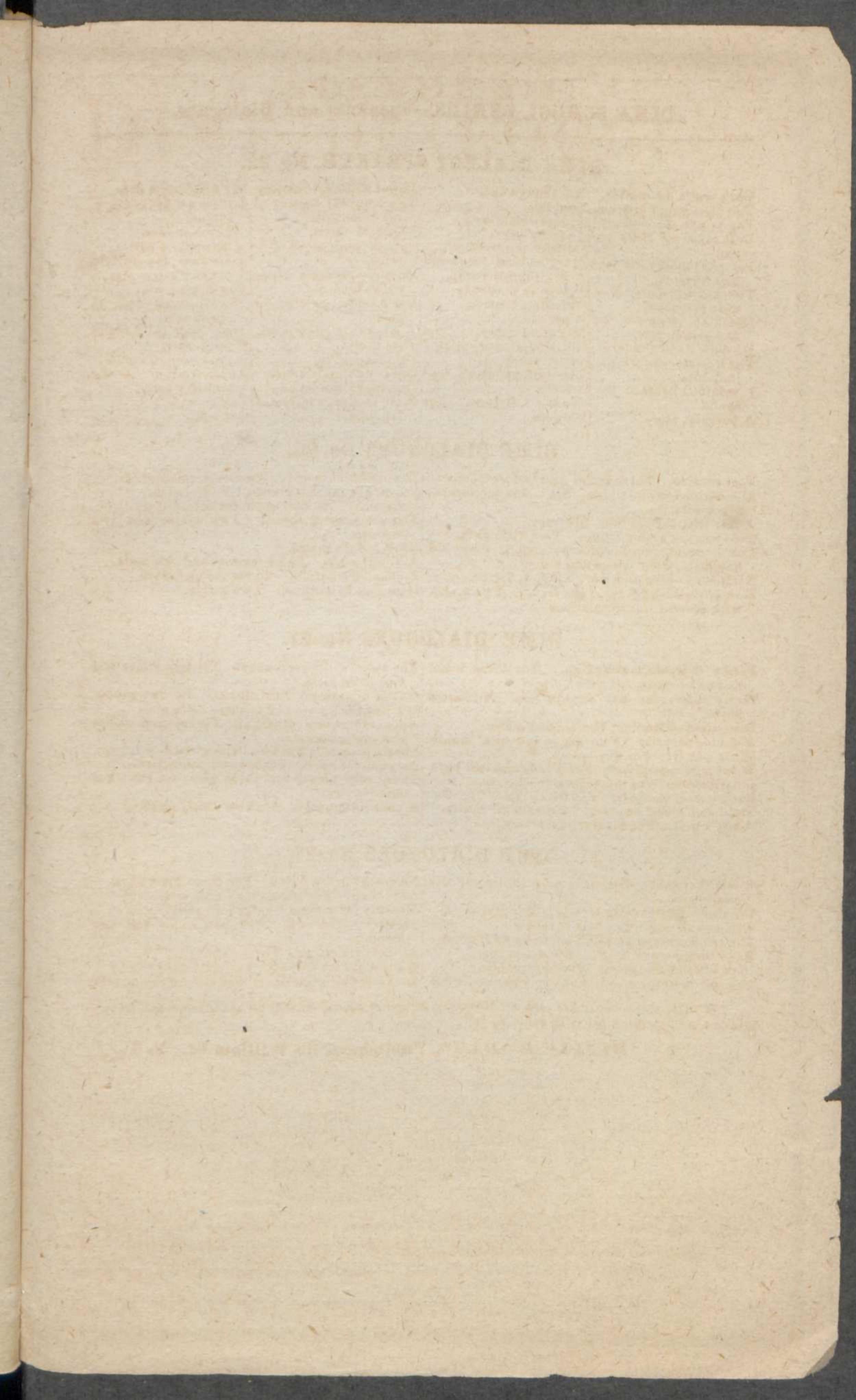
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